

Kidscreen®

engaging the global children's entertainment industry

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2021

Nicholas' 52x12' Fantastic Summer

Put on your swimwear, the holidays are here !

MIPCOM 2021:
Booth n° R7.A13



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MEDIATOON

Iconic characters tailored for success



STORYTIME JUST GOT FABULOUS

The

Fabulous

Show

WITH
Fay &
Fluffy

PRESCHOOL SERIES
26 X 11'



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OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2021

New order

Short seasons are all the rage; how can prodcos make them work?

MIPCOM picks

Time travel and Greek gods—hot shows headed to the Croisette

Alma's Way™

4-6 years
40 X 22'

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SAVE THE FUTURE



2021
DAYTIME EMMY
WINNER

A HULU ORIGINAL

ENDLINGS

TWEEN SERIES, 24 X 22'

hulu

CBC

NDR



RADIO-CANADA



ONTARIO
CREATES

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Production Tax Credit

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Screen Media Development
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Tax Credits

SINKING SHIP
ENTERTAINMENT



**THREE TIME
DAYTIME EMMY
WINNER**

*Including: Outstanding Performer in
a Children's, Family Viewing
or Special Class Program*

DINO DANA

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ON LINEAR AND STREAMING

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Knowledge:kids





ODD SQUAD



GLOBAL TELEVISION SUCCESS

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LINEAR AND STREAMING

114 X 22' EPISODES

AND TV MOVIE

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GAMEPLAYS

ODD SQUAD AGENT HANDBOOK

MACMILLAN KIDS

COSTUMES

FUN.COM

ACTIVITY BOOKS

BENDON

COMING IN 2022

DOLLAR TREE (MULTIPLE CATEGORY DTR PROGRAM),
TREASURES GIFTED (PARTY SUPPLIES)

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Canada

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Ontario
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SINKING SHIP
ENTERTAINMENT



THE DEMON



HEADMASTER

10 x 22' AVAILABLE



AS SEEN ON
BBC

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BBC Children's Production



THE UNLISTED

15 x 24' AVAILABLE



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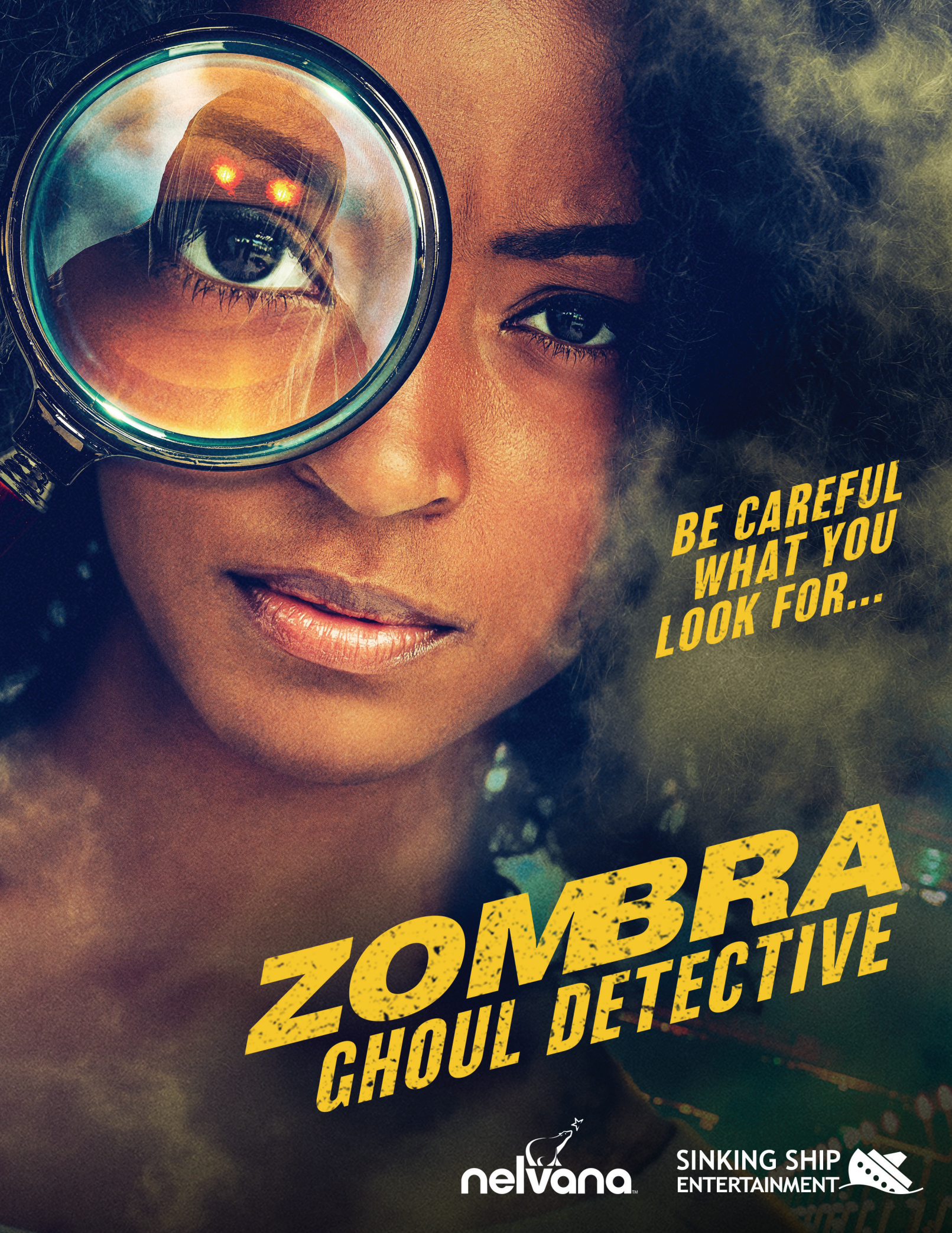
NSW
GOVERNMENT

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BUSTER
PRODUCTIONS

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**BE CAREFUL
WHAT YOU
LOOK FOR...**

ZOMBRA GHOUL DETECTIVE


nelvana

**SINKING SHIP
ENTERTAINMENT**



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kidscreen

October/November 2021

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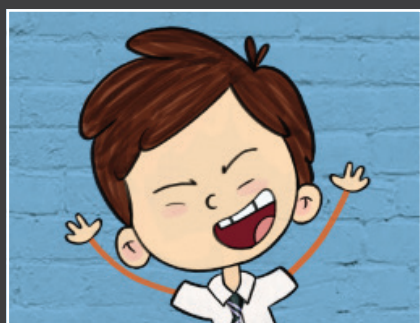
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CIRCLE SQUARE



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40 x 7 mins**





DANCE SPIES

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NEW FAMILY SERIES COMING 2023

BEYOND BLACK BEAUTY



Seif FILMS

SINKING SHIP
ENTERTAINMENT



AN OUT OF THIS WORLD COMEDY





COMING IN 2022

Take a Spaceship to Friendship!

52 x 11'
KIDS 5-9



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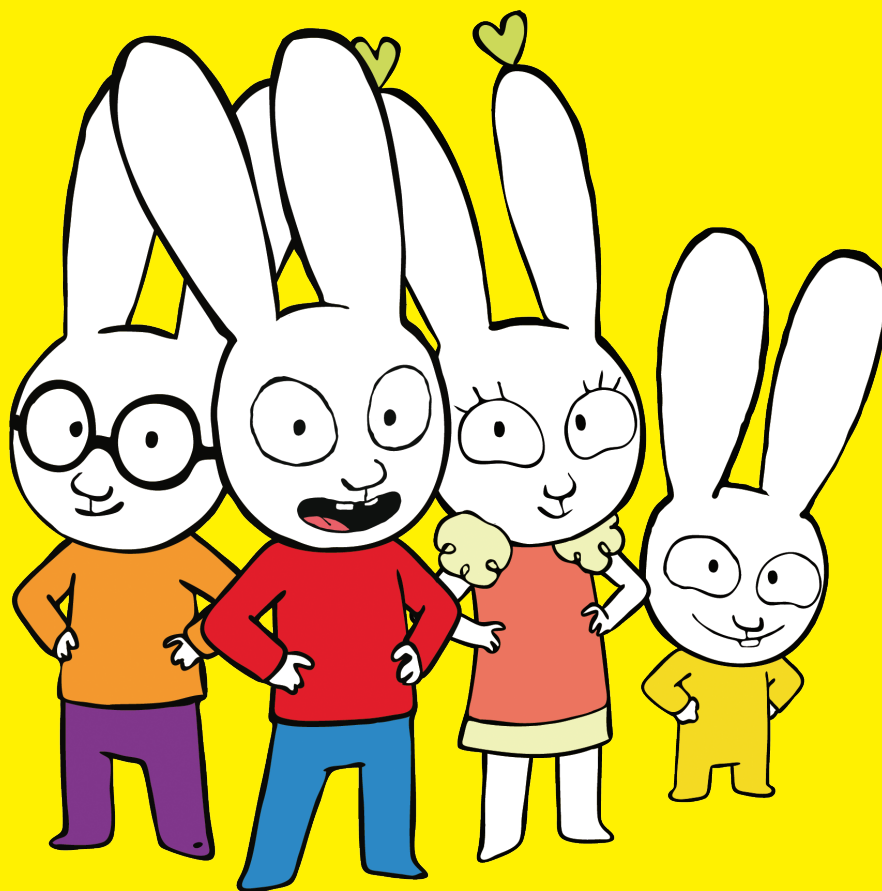


WHERE THE ENTERTAINMENT IS

distribution@studio100media.com | www.studio100group.com

156x5'

simon



3 Seasons available

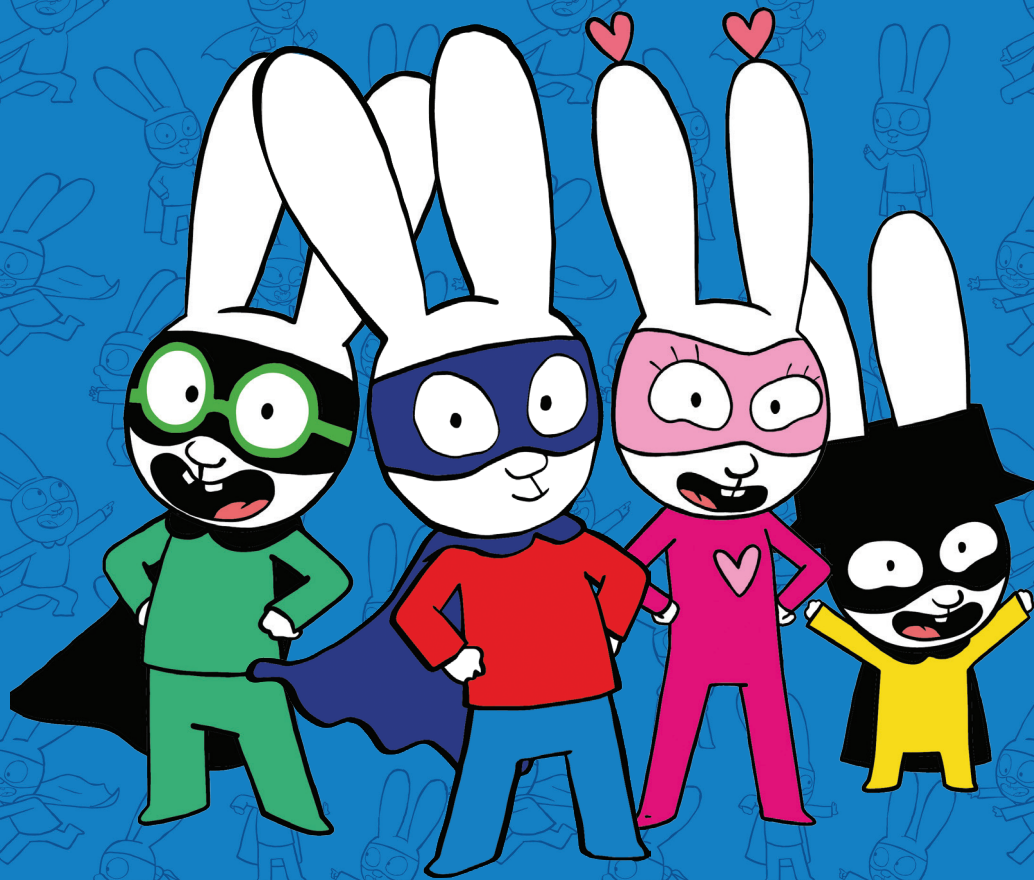
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NEW!

52x5'

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Partners already on board :

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Contact: Eric Garnet - eric.garnet@go-n.fr - <https://www.go-n.fr/>

GON
INTERNATIONAL



Everything new, all the time

Pivot! Pivot! PIVAHNT!

A child of the '90s through and through, the word "pivot" brings back memories of *Friends*. It was a weird quirk, but even as the world was burning, anytime someone (usually a corporate CEO or Silicon Valley type) announced plans for their "pandemic pivot," I chuckled a little. Hey, you had to find the joy somewhere.

But while the word was overused, the idea of adaptability is an important one in the business world, especially when your kids audience is constantly changing.

For many, the past 20 months have been a blur of last-minute plans that had to be re-thought and re-worked, and hail-Mary strategies that came out of left field, because, well, we had to do *something*.

But underlying those reactive decisions, businesses have been quietly adapting to the new normal—and recognizing that the "normal" part of that catchphrase is the reality that everything is new, all the time.

Some trends, like the shift towards a same-day theatrical/VOD release, crept up on the industry. Particularly on the blockbuster side, that shortening (or disappearing) theatrical window is going to have ramifications for years to come—and not just in terms of how studios and prodcos pay their top talent. Small- and medium-sized companies are going to have to figure out what a release strategy even means in a world where the

biggest box-office hits sometimes get a same-day SVOD premiere.

It's the latest in a long line of changes to content distribution strategies, an area where the entertainment industry often struggles to keep up.

Less than a decade ago, Netflix sent shock waves when it released its originals in batches of 10 episodes or less. But in no time, a few episodes every couple of months became the norm, at least in adult programming. In the kids space, the idea of a short-order season has been slower to catch on. Producers have been making them, but moving away from the 52 x 11-minute standard has a huge impact on ancillary business. Companies are really just now catching up with long-term, adaptable plans that make the most of this new reality (read more about the new season order on p. 62).

But with these limitations come some really exciting innovations. While anthology series aren't new, streamers seem to be greenlighting more of them than ever, using the short, bingeable seasons to their advantage to test new types of stories. As I was reading Jeremy Dickson's feature on this topic (p. 70), I was struck by a quote from Ampere Analytics' Fred Black, who said, "You can tweak [anthologies] halfway through, so it's easy to change from short form to a half hour, or split episodes into two. Their adaptability is key."

Producers can use short-order seasons and anthologies to test ideas, pilot new styles or try out new talent—which is hugely beneficial these days.

The business world—and your audience—is forever new, and we've seen some truly exciting and smart strategies for business/show/creative pivots both pre- and post-pandemic. (Special shoutout to Paper Owl, which is aging up its touching *Pablo* series to reach an entirely new demo with an end-to-end makeover—read more on p. 34).

Even if our lives weren't upended by the pandemic, the world was already changing fast. COVID-19 and related lockdowns simply accelerated a lot of the trends that were brewing, while also making way for some exciting and innovative new approaches to the status quo. Adaptability is key for all businesses, and the companies that can continue to PIVAHNT! will reap the rewards of that flexibility. (Just don't try and move a couch up a narrow staircase, and you'll probably be fine.)

—Megan Haynes

kidscreen

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& FRIENDS

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AND THE MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE™

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1x60'

Barbie

BIG CITY



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1 The competitor of my competitor is my...

Streamers Peacock and Paramount+ launched into an already crowded marketplace, and it was always going to be an uphill battle to stand out. Parentcos Comcast and ViacomCBS, however, have decided that rather than trying to take on Netflix, HBO Max and Disney+ alone, they should join together—in Europe, at least. SkyShowtime will feature programming from both Peacock and Paramount+, as well as Comcast's Sky NBCUniversal and Universal Pictures, and ViacomCBS's Showtime, Paramount Pictures and Nickelodeon. Now all that's left to do is take this show on the road.

THE LIST

Ten things on our radar this month



6

Game over

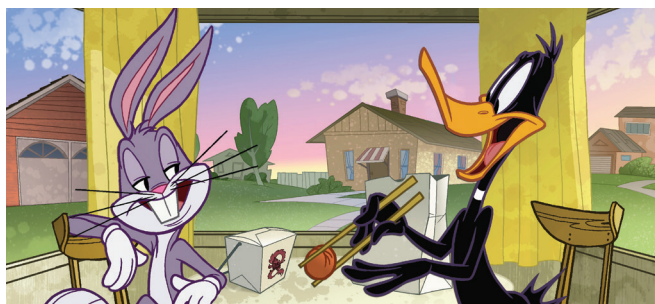
China introduced new restrictions for online gaming for under-18s. The regulations limit game play to just an hour a day on weekends and public holidays. Though public opinion is divided on the issue, it will be interesting to see how the region's US\$45.6-billion games market is affected by the restrictions.



7

Blockbusters are back

Disney's *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* had a US\$94.7-million holiday weekend debut in North America. But while cinemas are showing signs of life, kids content continues to dominate pay-VOD releases, signalling it might be too early to tell where younger-skewing movies will shine.



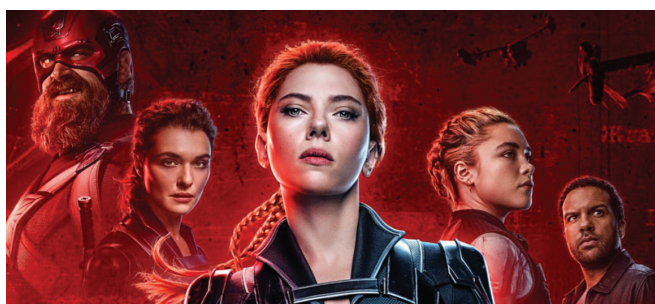
2 Separate worlds?

It seems that Warner Bros. Animation and Cartoon Network Studios could be evolving their relationship into something new. They're ostensibly different entities, but since Sam Register took charge of both last year, WBA and CNS have signed two joint overall deals to develop content for both businesses. It raises the question of just how separate these kidcos will remain.



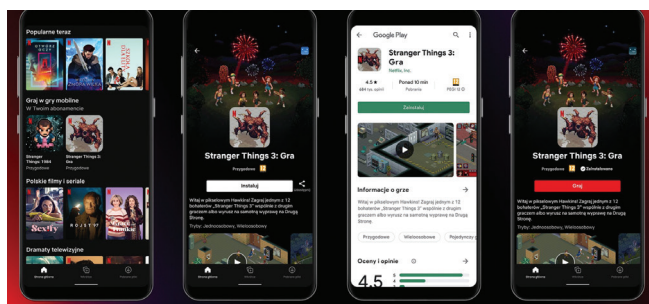
3 The kids aren't alright

Hospitalization rates for children are reaching new heights in the US, as kids who were previously least likely to be affected by COVID-19 now find themselves struggling with symptoms. And with 1,400 schools in the region closed as of September 9, this new wave is affecting children more than ever. To help, content producers will have to intensify their focus on the emotional wellbeing of kids.



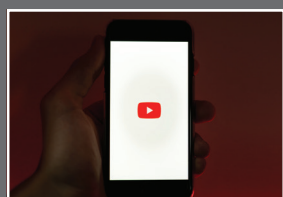
4 Seeing red

Marvel star Scarlett Johansson is suing Disney for allegedly breaking its promise to hold off on streaming *Black Widow* until after its theatrical window, affecting Johansson's bonuses, which were tied to box-office milestones. How this case is resolved will have a ripple effect on the rest of the industry, and could potentially change the shape of rollout strategy in the kids space.



5 Get into the game

Now that Netflix is at the top of the streaming heap with more than 200 million paid subscribers, tons of original content and some top talent exclusively in its stable, the SVOD is ready to press play on gaming. Netflix has released two *Stranger Things* games for Android in Poland, and plans to roll out mobile games as part of every membership worldwide at no additional cost.



8

(M)ad about YouTube

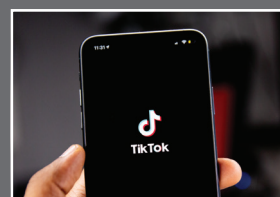
YouTube is now the number-one platform where US kids see ads. According to April data from eMarketer, 70% of kids ages two to 12 see or hear ads on the video sharing site, which is more than twice as many as TV (36%). Will parent and regulator safety concerns follow?



9

Never say never

Disney Channel US has acquired Saltbeef Productions' *Almost Never*—a live-action teen comedy-drama about members of a boy band chasing their dream of pop music fame. Given that most live-action productions ground to a halt in 2020, *Almost Never* marks a rare acquisition for Disney.



10

TikTok's new tune

TikTok is evolving beyond its song-and-dance roots. The app recently teamed up with Internet Matters to add educational resources to the platform. It also ushered in new privacy protections for its teen users, and parentco ByteDance acquired the VR startup Pico.

THE HOOKUP

Kidscreen checks in on the content needs of international distributors. For more of this type of intel, check out our *Global Pitch Guide* at kidscreen.com.



FilmRise (US)

Jonitha Keymoore
Senior director of global content acquisitions

Looking for: Established family-friendly TV series for kids and co-viewing audiences with themes such as teamwork and inclusivity.

Style: Mainly live action since we're focused on the older kid or family-friendly space. 2D animation also works well since we are interested in iconic kids shows.

Demographic: Eight-year-olds to young adults

Format: 30 minutes for series, and 60 to 90 minutes for TV specials and movies.

Buying strategy: We are open to co-developing new family-friendly TV movies or specials. Otherwise, we prefer content that is already financed. We are focused on global content partnerships with other territories, and are looking for non-exclusive AVOD rights. SVOD rights and exclusivity are good to have, but not essential.

Recently acquired series: *Beyblade*, *Detentionaire*, *Preston & Briana*



Little Engine Distribution (Canada)

Maria Kennedy
Owner, head of sales and distribution
Kyle Perez
New business lead

Looking for: Fun 2D- or 3D-animated short-form preschool content such as music-led series or shows that teach positive social lessons. We're also looking for family-friendly live-action/CG hybrid series that push boundaries and explore progressive topics. We're not seeking puppetry series.

Style: 2D and 3D animation, live-action/CG hybrids

Demographic: Preschool (two to four) and upper preschool (five to six) for animation. School-aged (seven to nine) and tween (nine to 12) for live-action/CG hybrid series.

Format: 26 and 52 x 11 minutes, 39 x seven minutes and 40 x five minutes for preschool animation. For school-aged and tween live action, we want 26 and 52 x 11 minutes and 13 x half hours.

Buying strategy: We're currently looking to co-produce with studios in the UK, EU and Australia at budget ranges between US\$1 million and US\$5 million. We're interested in non-exclusive and exclusive AVOD/SVOD deals.

Recently acquired series: *Baby Baby*, *Space Kids*, *Scout & The Gumboot Kids*



Australian Children's Television Foundation

Bernadette O'Mahony
Head of content

Looking for: Australian stories with global appeal. Live-action drama and animation continue to make up most of our development slate, with a small amount of factual. We love comedy, drama and don't shy away from difficult subjects.

Style: Live action and animation

Demographic: Preschoolers and six- to 12-year-olds

Format: Live-action drama is generally 10 or 15 x 15 or 30 minutes. Animation ranges from 26 x 15 minutes to 13 or 26 x half hours. Seven-minute animated episodes are acceptable, too.

Buying strategy: The ACTF only develops with Australian producers, and is looking for original series concepts to invest in early. On select projects, we may assist in financing, provide distribution advances and distribute the series on completion. We also make series available to Australian schools as a resource so they can have a secondary life beyond broadcast.

Recent international sales: *Hardball*, *First Day*, *The Inbestigators*

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King of the jungle



National Geographic Kids, with support from Disney, is seeking new partners—starting with a safari-themed consumer products program.

BY: ELIZABETH FOSTER

Disney purchased National Geographic's TV channels, studios, magazine and other media assets as part of its US\$71-billion acquisition of 21st Century Fox in 2019. And

now Nat Geo Kids is taking cues from the House of Mouse as it shifts its licensing strategy and brings in new partners.

Nat Geo Kids is a children's brand with a scientific organization at its center, and while education will continue to be a core tenet, the company's new direction with Disney will incorporate licensees that focus more on fun, says Paul Southern, SVP of franchise and licensing for Lucasfilm and National Geographic.

This strategy starts with Nat Geo Kids' upcoming safari-focused consumer products

program. Animals are evergreen, and the fan-favorite safari theme provides the company with a strong foundation to start making changes, he says.

The CP program is launching with a line from Florida-based toymaker Just Play. Available on Amazon this month, it includes figures, plush and roleplay items.

Core toys will be available from US\$15, while specialty items will retail for US\$100. Each item will also include a QR code that unlocks Nat Geo Kids content online. Moving forward, Southern says the CP program will expand to include additional softlines and back-to-school items.

Beyond this safari-centric offering, however, Nat Geo is looking to partner with new licensees and appeal to older demographics, according to Southern.

In recent months, the team has been busy developing new relationships with brands like Reebok, the Gap and Tentree to create lifestyle products that will appeal to the entire family.

National Geographic Kids is benefitting from Disney's extensive licensing partnerships in this effort, and Southern says the House of Mouse has spent the last two years diving into the core of the Nat Geo brand to determine which new avenues work best from a product perspective. The next step is to create connections with licensees in these areas.

"Our partners are going to play a key role in growth for this brand," Southern says. "The opportunities are endless for the franchise." **k**



26 HALF HOURS

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...WE'RE BACK!



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Dubit's big game play

The market research firm and game developer is rolling out an eSports program to help companies reach kids in an interactive way on popular platforms like Roblox.

BY: RYAN TUCHOW

Dubit is taking a new step into the world of Roblox with a gaming program to tap into kid interest in eSports and virtual events.

The Metaverse Gaming League (MGL) is a newly launched competition series featuring branded live-streams with influencers. In each event, kids play different games in Roblox and can claim prizes on the MGL website. While the research firm has been quietly running weekly events since July, it officially launched this month.

Companies and brands including L.O.L. Surprise! and GoNoodle are able to sponsor the Roblox or branded game streams, while players compete to earn big prizes. The events are streamed on Twitch, YouTube and TikTok, and after the competition ends,

its videos will live as evergreen content on social channels, says Dubit co-founder Matthew Warneford.

The program will also provide valuable insights to the UK-based research and development firm and create a new touchpoint for clients looking to reach kid audiences. Hosting an event where players can interact with content featuring influencers they recognize makes the league a more interactive marketing tool than just making an ad or putting a game online, Warneford says.

Roblox has more than 165 million active monthly users, and in a recent Dubit survey, 55% of nine- to 12-year-olds in the US said they had played on the platform at least once over the course of the week. And

one in five two- to 15-year-olds said they had found new brands in the games they played—which is better than advertising online or in movie theaters.

By the end of year, Dubit's goal is to run daily events, creating a destination that kids check frequently for new content and gaming opportunities.

Warneford says the long-term plan is to grow the league beyond Roblox, so Dubit is working on creating versions of the competition that can live on platforms like Fortnite Creative and Manticore, where kids can play and also build their own games.

"MGL taps into kids' desire to have fun and gives brands a way to reach them that's more exciting for the users." **k**



Nicholas' 52x12'

Fantastic Summer

Put on your swimwear,
the holidays are here !





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BIG GIG

Kelly Joeman



THE BIG GIG: Senior manager of audience development at One Animation

PREVIOUSLY: Digital manager at Entertainment One

SOCIAL SKILLS From keeping up with the ever-changing YouTube algorithm, to figuring out the best way to repackage content for social media platforms, Kelly Joeman has built up a fair bit of experience helping companies broaden their digital reach. She's looking forward to putting it to good use at One Animation.

In her new role, which she started in September, Joeman is responsible for growing the company's YouTube networks and digital reach across its catalogue of popular preschool shows including *Insectibles*, *Antiks* and flagship comedy *Oddbods*.

Joeman will work closely with the studio's production team to make sure they're creating engaging, bite-sized content that succeeds on social from the get-go. It's a task that she's well-suited to after spending years at Entertainment One as digital manager.

"Every brand needs a nuanced strategy on social," says Joeman. "With One Animation's catalogue, my focus is on tapping into what kids and parents are already relating to with its properties, which is the humor and attention to trends."

ODD OPPORTUNITIES For non-dialogue comedy *Oddbods* (600 x one minute), Joeman's goal is to ensure the social approach retains the ingredients that give the brand cross-generational appeal, she says. These elements include slapstick comedy for kids, and a sprinkling of references (like movie parodies) that resonate with parents, she says.

Joeman also has her eye on new trends, and is focused on finding ways to use the *Oddbods* characters to tackle timely topics. For example, the studio has been tapping into themes of wellness with its new mixed-media show *Oddbods: Busy Bodies*, in which a live-action host teaches kids yoga and breathing exercises. Joeman plans to build on this work with new and repurposed short-form videos on social featuring characters exercising and encouraging kids to get moving.

GOING FOR GROWTH But to start, Joeman is looking at where One Animation's content sits on YouTube (its English-language *Oddbods* channel has 7.8 million subscribers, compared to 360,000 for Rob the Robot's channel), pinpointing the most popular characters for each of its brands, and planning ways to build hype for new releases—like development project *Abigail's Tales*. Ultimately, Joeman wants to build the studio into a social media powerhouse that reaches kids all over the world.

"I'm excited to experiment with new types of content, as well as to reach a global audience. I plan to bring my blend of analytics and a love of content to the company to keep growing its social success." —Ryan Tuchow



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Nicholas'

Fantastic Summer

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PRESCHOOL'S BIGGEST HIT!

nickelodeon

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For more info, contact Thanda Belker at thanda.belker@pocket.watch



BBC Children's widens its reach

Now that the dust is settling after a wave of operational, leadership and content strategy changes designed to make the pubcaster more audience-focused and internationally competitive, BBC Children's and its in-house productions unit are beginning to ramp up for 2022.

BY: JEREMY DICKSON



To say a lot has changed in the year since former Turner EMEA chief content officer Patricia Hidalgo (pictured, top) took the reins as director of children's and education from Alice Webb is an understatement. After saying farewell to head of content Cheryl Taylor in April, the pubcaster switched up Sarah Muller's role to head of acquisitions and commissioning for seven to 12s, as well as hiring former eOne exec Kate Morton to lead acquisitions and commissioning for preschoolers (zero to six).

Jessica Schibli was also brought in at the beginning of the year as BBC Children's first-ever diversity and inclusion lead to ensure all of the pubcaster's content is reflective of UK kids, and that its in-house teams are diverse, too.

On the operational side, big changes are coming for in-house productions, which will transition next April from operating as a unit of BBC Children's to being managed by commercial arm BBC Studios. Head of in-house productions Helen Bullough (pictured, bottom) is overseeing the move, which aims to increase BBC Studios' financial returns by 30% within five years by growing some of its existing kids brands and new ones into global entertainment hits for a range of third-party broadcasters and platforms.

While the changes shake out, BBC Children's continues to grow its programming portfolio. Despite the pandemic, the pubcaster commissioned more than 32 different projects last year, a slight decrease from a typical year, when it works with about 50 indie prodcos on new content. Whether it gets back to pre-pandemic levels in 2022 remains to be seen, but in the meantime, the pubcaster's performance hasn't suffered. Combined with BBC Children's content on the Beeb's VOD service iPlayer, kids channels CBeebies and CBBC generated a record 1.2 billion minutes of content viewing per week in 2020.

To continue this momentum and provide a wider offering of platform-agnostic content next year, BBC Children's is on the hunt for more animated comedies for seven to 12s, eco-themed concepts, diversity- and inclusion-led productions, preschool dramas and content based on well-known brands like CoComelon and Pokémon, which both recently launched on iPlayer.

Kidscreen caught up with Hidalgo and Bullough to discuss what the future holds for kids content at the British pubcaster.

Why did BBC Children's decide to merge commissioning and acquisitions based on age groups for the first time?

Patricia Hidalgo: When I joined a year ago, we were in the middle of the pandemic, and we were already seeing a big shift in viewing from linear to streaming. All of the competition coming from other digital entertainment outlets meant we needed to change the way we approached our strategy. That's why we decided to become a little more audience-targeted rather than channel-targeted. For the most part, children's channels have always had broad [audiences], and we knew from the way kids consume content that our targets needed to be narrower than they've been in the past.

[In terms of blending acquisitions and commissioning teams,] whether we fund content from a UK company, an international

player or our own in-house productions, we want the best content. How we manage that is by making sure our commissions and acquisitions teams are working together and sharing information.

What other structural changes are in the works?

PH: We have a new content and performance strategy department that we are hiring for. [The BBC has since announced former Disney director Anna Taganov has joined to lead the new department.] The lead will handle all of the scheduling of our channels and iPlayer, as well as developing a strategy for the content we will need.

The channel has pivoted away from twice-annual commissioning periods to year-round commissions—how is BBC Children's benefiting from this new strategy so far?

PH: It's helping speed up our process so we can re-commission faster. For example, we renewed our in-house animated preschool series *JoJo & Gran Gran* for a second and third season quite quickly when we saw how well it was doing with our audiences. To date, it's one of our top-ranked shows, and was recently sold internationally to Nickelodeon's preschool edutainment service Noggin, marking its US debut. Having volume is working well for us and for other platforms, too.

We are developing hard in the six-plus space

—Helen Bullough, BBC Children's

What's the reasoning behind the launch of BBC Children's Ignite program, which is in the process of offering development funding for up to 20 animated concepts from new UK creators?

PH: Some of the best animation shows, especially for preschoolers, come from the UK. But we feel we haven't worked with animation for seven to 12s to the same level, so we're [using Ignite] to invest more in that space. We want to focus on British culture and storytelling, but it doesn't mean we won't work with international partners on co-productions. One of the things I don't want to do is miss out on opportunities. I want people to know they can come to us at any time with an idea, even if it's in the very early stages.

The sale of *JoJo & Gran Gran* seems to align with the strategy behind the pending absorption of in-house productions into BBC Studios. How are you feeling about this operational move?

PH: I couldn't be happier to integrate what is one of the most experienced and knowledgeable children's production teams into such a formidable production and distribution entity. A lot of the great content [the] in-house [team] makes for the UK can actually travel now, and we're already seeing this with shows like *JoJo & Gran Gran*. Seeing more of this great storytelling from Great Britain travel around the world ultimately benefits everyone.

What kind of content is the in-house productions team interested in right now?

Helen Bullough: We are developing hard in the six-plus space, especially comedies with co-viewing potential. Authentic, diverse stories are also offering us some exciting possibilities, and we have some high-end game show formats we would love to discuss.

What do you think BBC Studios will look like come April:

HB: It will be an exciting new chapter. We will be working in a content production operation, meaning we can grow more global creative opportunities and safeguard our ability to produce high-quality content that reflects the lives and passions of UK kids and delivers value to families.

At a time when growth in the global children's market means there is more demand for kids content and greater competition for talent, the move will help our team find new ideas and projects going forward.

How is BBC Children's progressing with its diversity and inclusion initiatives?

PH: We have increased our commissioning fund so Jessica [Schibli] now has a budget of US\$411,000 (GBP£300,000) for this fiscal year to spend on diverse content and ensure that leadership roles are diverse on productions and throughout the senior ranks of companies, including ours. If an indie we're working with needs to improve its on-screen diversity or off-screen representation, they can apply to the fund for support.

[The funding ties into the BBC's previously announced diversity mandate, which states that, as of April 2021, at least 20% of production companies' teams must be from historically excluded groups for all new commissions.]

HB: There is never any room for complacency in this area. We have shows like *The Dumping Ground*, *Something Special* and *JoJo & Gran Gran* already demonstrating the impact that thoughtful and authentic storytelling can have on screen. Off screen, we're also working with [Schibli] on the 20% diverse production goal to ensure we can monitor how a company is doing against its commitment, using data to judge if it has met the requirement.

Additionally, we're leveraging BBC initiatives like 50:50 and New Voices to expand the diversity of our writing team, and we have a number of people championing [for change] in the department.

What will be your biggest challenge over the next year?

PH: We are all thinking about going back into the offices, but there is still uncertainty. We don't know how that is going to happen, and not being physically and personally with your teams is challenging for everyone. We are at that point where we really need to start having those personal connections. Because of the world we live in, staying relevant to our audiences is going to be the most challenging—that's not just for us at the BBC, it is for everyone.

HB: There is a constant need for vigilance as we hopefully come out of the pandemic. I am hopeful that our challenges will stop centering around the pandemic and go back to being normal, such as how do we make the most relevant, high-quality content for kids. If we can get back to that being our overriding challenge, rather than the pandemic, I will be really thankful. **K**

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Growth spurt

After two successful seasons, *Pablo*—and its titular character—is aging up with its audience, transforming into a mixed-media show for five to eights.

BY: ALEXANDRA WHYTE

Like many kids do in the fall, Paper Owl Films' *Pablo* is heading off to school for the first time.

The preschool series is getting a third season that's all about aging up into the five to eight bracket along with its audience. And that means new character designs, new story framing and a new overall tone.

The original *Pablo* is a hybrid 2D-animated/live-action series produced by Paper Owl Films, Kavaleer Production and Ingenious Media. It follows a five-year-old autistic boy and the imaginary animal friends he uses to make sense of the world. Distributed by CAKE, the series premiered on CBeebies in 2017, and has since aired internationally on channels and platforms such as ABC Kids, NatGeo Kids and Netflix.

Over its two-season run, the 104 x 11-minute series has scooped up a variety of awards, been praised for its sensitive handling of autism, and generated a range of books by Penguin Random House, games and an upcoming stage show.

Traditionally, when a 52 x 11-minute preschool series gets to its third season, the original audience has aged out, and new episodes simply target a new cohort of kids.

But instead of aiming to engage another group of preschoolers, this new iteration of *Pablo* is meant to follow its original viewers as they grow up, says Grainne McGuinness, creative director at Paper Owl Films.

Rather than an animated/live-action hybrid, season three will be an animated retelling of eight-year-old Pablo's day at school through his own eyes.

And as part of the aging-up strategy, these new eps will mix 2D and 3D animation with photoreal elements.



While the *Pablo* brand was doing well, it was time for a change, and that need became pressing when McGuinness learned an alarming fact. In 2015, when she started working on the series, 46% of autistic kids reported being bullied in school. By 2021, that number had shot up to 75%, according to British organization Ambitious for Autism.

Unlike the first two seasons, this new one won't primarily target kids with autism, says McGuinness. By telling the story through Pablo's eyes and broadening the show's audience, she's hoping to foster empathy among all kids and shine more light on the experience of those living on the autism spectrum.

"We want to build a show with a central character who happens to be autistic that will be a hit around the world, encouraging kids to get to know the autistic kids in their class," says McGuinness. "To succeed, it has to be something that all children want to watch, so that's the way that we're developing it."

While renewals typically mean much shorter development periods (if any), Paper Owl has been working on season three for the past year and a half, says McGuinness.

To start, though many of the original writers (all of whom have autism) will stay on to help *Pablo* reach an older audience, Paper Owl has also hired adult-skewing comedy writers

to inject more humor into the series. Pablo's anthropomorphized animal friends, each representing a different trait of an autistic kid, were also aged up.

For example, in the original, the characters were drawn to mimic the look of crayon art. But as an older kid, Pablo has matured into using markers and pens for his drawings, so his imaginary friends have taken on new photoreal elements.

The traits they represent needed to grow with Pablo, too. His mouse companion—who is sensitive to sounds and smells—has to learn how to deal with an overwhelmingly loud and smelly school environment.

With development funding from existing partners CAKE and Northern Ireland Screen, Paper Owl is looking to go into production next year. Ultimately, school-aged Pablo will stick around for two seasons before—if all goes according to plan—he grows a little more, ready to enter his (live-action) high school phase and deal with new issues unique to teens with autism.

"We have to create a standout, funny, action-packed, mainstream show because that's the only way that it's going to deliver," says McGuinness. "But we're ambitious that this show will be right up there with *SpongeBob* or *Loud House*." **K**

NEFERTINE

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Rolling the dice

For a new independent studio, launching an unknown original as a first property—in a market dominated by well-known brands—can be a costly and time-consuming affair. Can up-and-comer Grilled Cheese Media buck the trend with its low-risk, low-cost approach to *Major Marlo Meets the Monster from Mars*?

BY: JEREMY DICKSON

When animation vet Bob Harper (*Prank Boy*) and actor/comedian/director Dave Coulier (*Full House*) launched LA-based Grilled Cheese Media earlier this year, they knew they had some weighty credits backing them. Harper, for one, has worked exclusively on family-friendly content for Disney, DreamWorks, Cartoon Network and Nickelodeon. And Coulier brought his *Full House* pedigree, plus a bevy of voice-over credits on animated hits including *Muppet Babies* and *Scooby-Doo*.

But despite their resumé—and a development slate of more than 10 original concepts—they knew it would be hard to make inroads in the kids space unless they were strategic about brand-building. For this reason, Grilled Cheese is rolling out its first IP—Major Marlo Meets the Monster from Mars—simultaneously as a self-published book and self-funded 2D-animated short film.

“We’re taking something simple with very little risk that could potentially grow into a bigger property for TV, publishing and the theatrical shorts world,” says Harper.

He created the preschool concept in 2010 to teach kids about the letter M through alliteration. “The main character was an imaginative girl who went to Mars to engage with a monster that was causing a great menace to the Martian metropolis,” he says.

Harper expanded the concept as a children’s book, launched a website, and re-designed and re-animated a short he had made based on the character. Now, *Major Marlo Meets the Monster from Mars* has launched as a paperback and eBook through Amazon’s self-publishing platform Kindle Direct Publishing.

Grilled Cheese chose the on-demand publishing route so it wouldn’t have a warehouse full of books that might not sell. “It’s a

low-risk way of introducing our character and growing a following,” Harper says.

Grilled Cheese also submitted the *Major Marlo* short to 20 film festivals using the free festival submission platform filmfreeway.com. It targeted the less expensive fests—those with entry fees under US\$15—and shied away from the Oscar feeders, since the tone of the short wasn’t a fit. “The main goal is to get exhibited globally, as opposed to winning,” he says. “Buyers like to see a built-in audience, so the more audience we get, the more valuable the IP becomes. It’s very little financial risk with a big potential payoff.”

Grilled Cheese is also using the short as a teaser/pilot for a potential preschool show, tapping Coulier’s social media following to bring attention to the company’s overall brand of wholesome comedy.

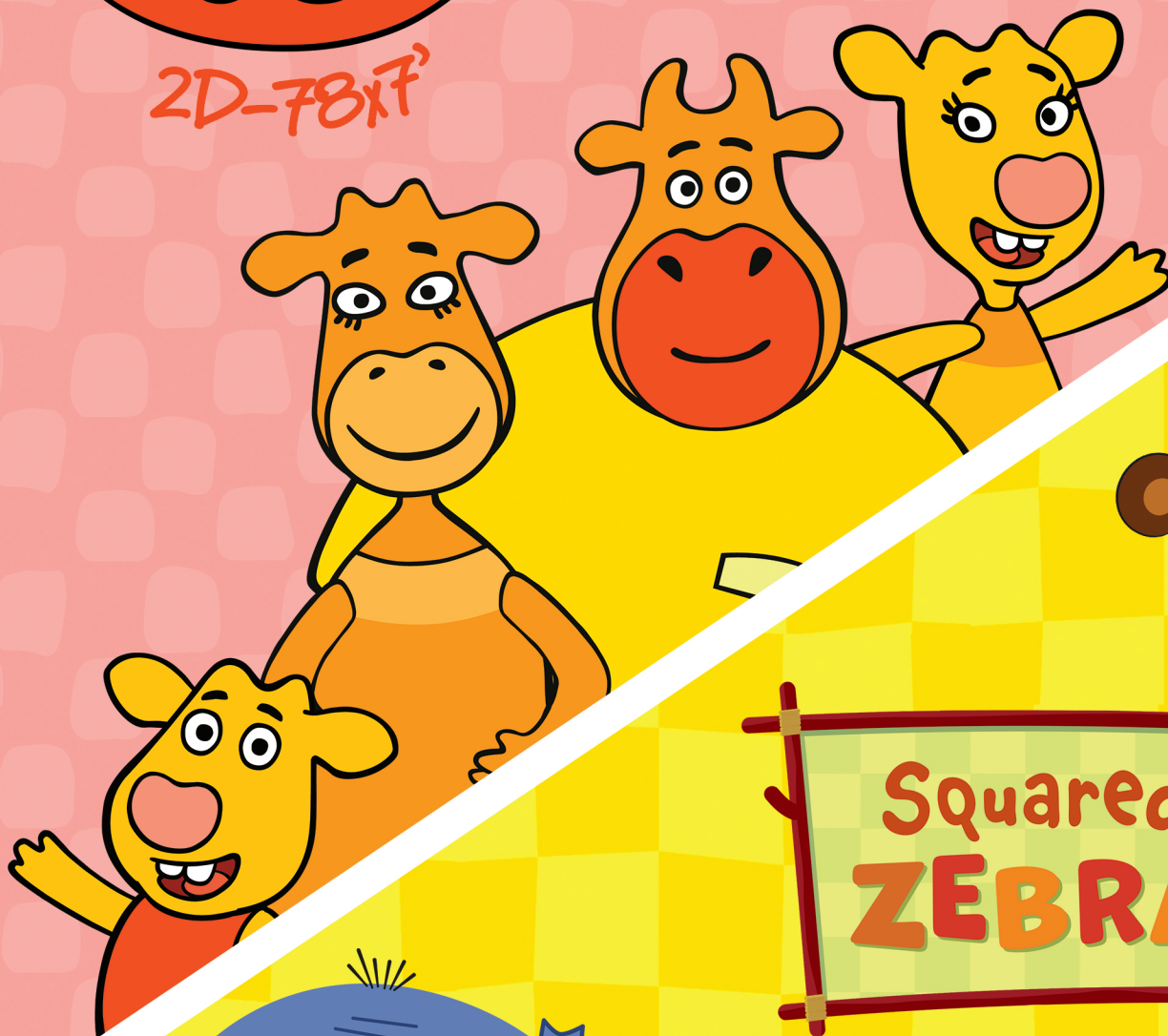
“Besides animation, we are open to everything from live action to hybrid projects and puppetry. The nuttier and sillier, the better,” says Harper.

The studio is hoping its low-risk, low-cost approach to Major Marlo will help attract partners to its other projects, which include half a dozen series ideas for six- to 11-year-olds, a few feature film scripts and a handful of preschool concepts—one of which has already been optioned.

Moving forward, its biggest challenge will be patience. “Things will come easier once we prove that we can get our first big IP out to the market,” says Harper. **K**

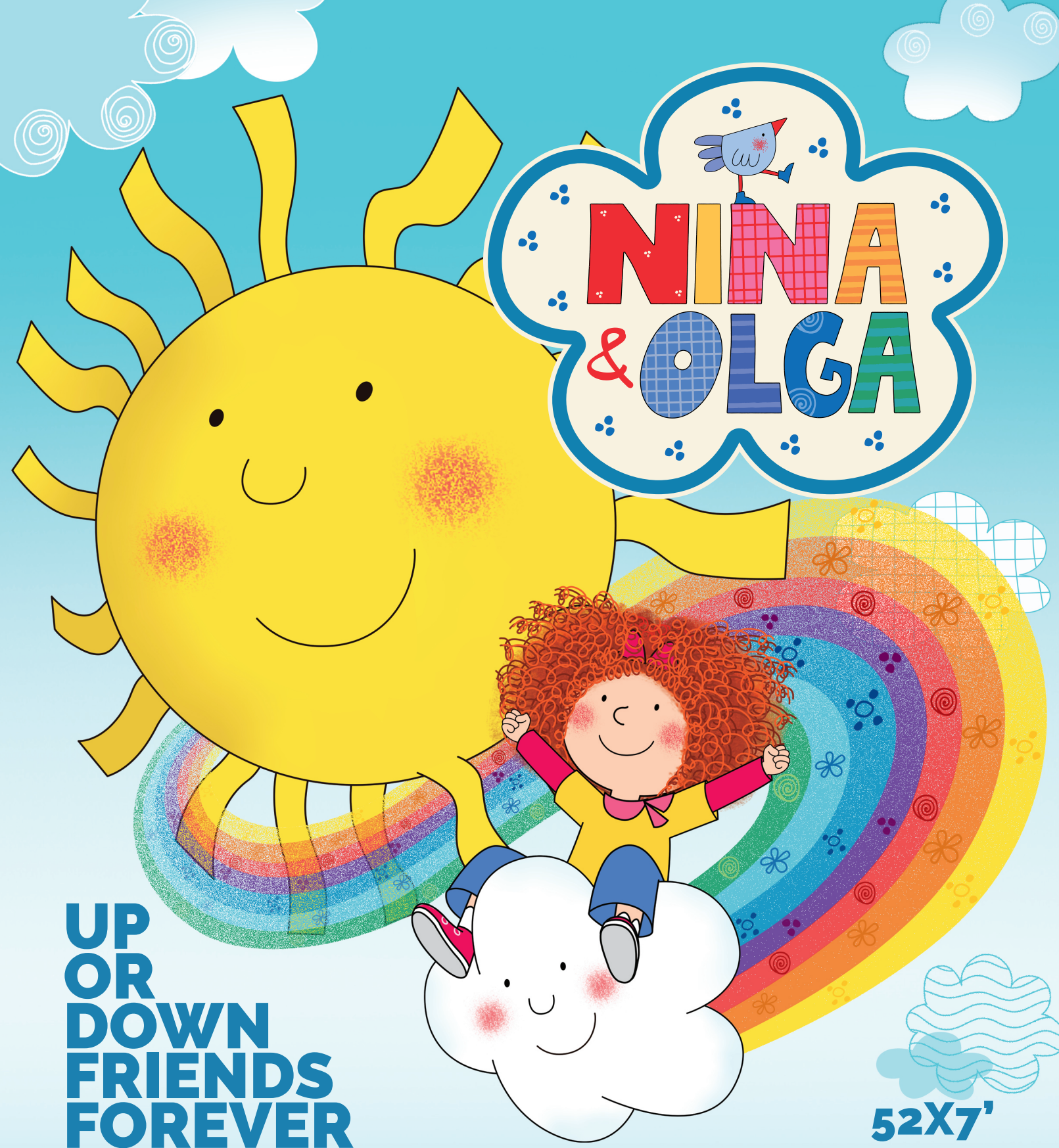
ORANGE MOO-COW

2D-78x7'



2D-78x7'





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OR
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Tik, Tik... BOOM!

Trending on TikTok is the best thing that can happen to a book, with everyone from retailers to producers taking their cues from the platform's tween and teen creators.

BY: ELIZABETH FOSTER

Forget whatever you think you know about the greatest rivalries of all time, because nothing compares to the fervor with which tweens and teens debated the merits of Team Edward vs. Team Jacob. Stephenie Meyer's young adult fantasy *Twilight* hit shelves in 2005, with another book rolling out annually for the next three years. By the time the first feature film based on the series hit the big screen in 2008, fans were well and truly obsessed.

That same year, the first book in Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* series was released, and the conversation grew to include whether you preferred Peeta or Gale. Four blockbuster films followed, raking in nearly US\$3 billion worldwide and kicking off a massive trend of dystopian young adult books-turned-movies.





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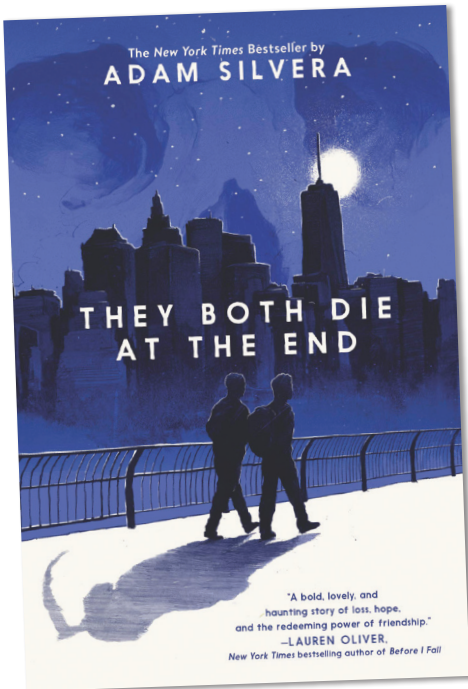
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SEASON 2 AND 3 COMING SOON!

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It was recently announced that 2017's *They Both Die at the End* will be adapted for TV

The YA book/movie relationship is a symbiotic one. Popular young adult books have been a huge inspiration for blockbuster movies and TV series, which in turn drives viewers unfamiliar with the source material to buy the books.

According to a report in *The Atlantic*, books that are made into films see their Goodreads ratings increase by more than 1,000%, compared to titles that aren't adapted.

Release delays and lockdowns over the last 18 months, however, have meant publishers haven't been able to rely on these adaptations to drive sales in the same way. But it turns out you don't need the Hollywood treatment to drive audiences to bookshelves because TikTok has stepped in.

According to April 2021 data from market research firm The NPD Group, the young adult fiction category had grown by 68%. In fact, the 10 million units sold during this period outpaced the eight million units sold during the same time frame in 2014, which was the previous best-selling year for the category. (NPD reports that around six million units were sold each year during the same period in 2018, 2019 and 2020.)

This recent growth is being attributed to TikTok, as creators on the platform (they call their corner of the app BookTok) shared reviews and reading lists with millions of

followers and strangers throughout the pandemic. Trending on TikTok is the new golden ticket—the two bestselling titles from January through May 2021 were Adam Silvera's 2017 novel *They Both Die at the End* and E. Lockhart's 2014 book *We Were Liars*. These older titles found new life on BookTok, going viral after they were included on a number of reading lists. In fact, *We Were Liars* landed on the *New York Times* Best Seller list six years after it was published. A January 2021 viral TikTok for the title preceded a sales spike of 17,000 units in one week, according to NPD data.

"These books that were several years old were popping up on the sales lists, and there were no events, articles or content pushing them. I looked into it on social media and was able to trace it back to TikTok," says Kristen McLean, executive director of business development and primary analyst for NPD Books.

Publishers also observed the increase in sales and started their own investigations into BookTok. Then, McLean says, booksellers caught on. Retailers like Barnes & Noble and Target started marketing around TikTok, putting together displays with titles that were trending on the platform. It turned into a virtuous circle, with trending books being featured in stores, and therefore becoming more likely to be picked up by readers and shared on TikTok, she says. This phenomenon supports the industry, but also makes it more difficult for the NPD team to determine how much sales volume can be attributed to TikTok, and how much is due to the efforts of booksellers.

Beyond sales data, McLean says the focus of publishers and retailers on the social media platform is bound to alter the nature of BookTok.

"Publishers have already started to pay creators to make sponsored content the way they do on other social media platforms, and that takes some of the organic quality out of it," she says. If all of the book-focused videos on the platform start to feel like paid ads, tweens and teens will likely migrate to another app that feels more authentic.

In an attempt to avoid this, the team at Random House Children's Books is working to take advantage of TikTok without altering its creator culture.

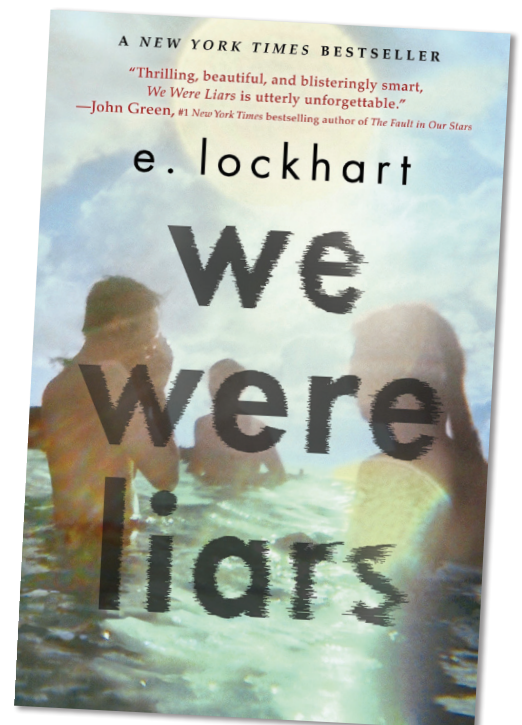
"Over the last 18 months or so, there has been so much more attention paid

to not only what we're seeing on the platform, but how we're leveraging that content," says John Adamo, SVP of marketing for Random House Children's Books. "TikTok has sort of changed everything we do from a social strategy. It's been disruptive in a really positive way."

While Random House works with Instagram influencers to create campaigns and employs a lifestyle photographer to take stylized photos for the aesthetic-focused platform, Adamo says the team's approach to TikTok has been significantly different. The appeal of creators' videos on BookTok is how raw and unrehearsed they feel, he explains, so Random House decided to focus on spotlighting existing content without trying to impose its own agenda.

"We do have an official TikTok account, and we're trying to find a balance between the things we post and the existing videos that we find and amplify," says Adamo. "If we see someone post a review and they're getting attention, we reach out to them. Unlike on Instagram, where we have a running list of influencers we tap, this is more organic. It doesn't have to be the same person over and over, and I think that's a good thing. You get different perspectives. It's a different model, and we're getting a different response, clearly. We've never seen

E. Lockhart's *We Were Liars* experienced a sales bump of 17,000 units in one week following a viral TikTok video



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a response from an Instagram campaign the way we've seen those efforts translate on the TikTok platform."

TikTok also changed Random House's budget. Since recognizing the power of the platform's reading lists and reviews over a year ago, the team has redirected funds that were previously spent on print ads and physical promo materials to its online and social campaigns. BookTok also led the team to re-think its scheduling strategy, Adamo says.

"The very old-school publishing mentality is that you plan [marketing] 12 to 18 months out. Now, it's a matter of determining what the plan is four weeks out. And that might shift as you get closer to launch, or even after the book comes out. A real-time strategy is definitely front and center for us more than ever," he explains.

This is especially important because TikTok isn't linear like Instagram or Twitter, Adamo says. Users on the app are just as likely to see a video from three months ago as they are to see one from three hours ago, which means backlist titles (like Random House's *We Were Liars*) can go viral at any time.

Audiences are so focused on some of these older titles, in fact, that their popularity is influencing producers. Backlist books like *They Both Die at the End* and *One of Us Is Lying* (2017) recently landed upcoming TV adaptations, and BookTok continues to boost the profiles of books from years gone by. But while those kinds of older titles have been Random House's bread and butter for the past 18 months, Adamo says that launching new books has been difficult even with the significant sales increases for YA.

"It's been so much more difficult to establish new books during this pandemic period because readers have been returning to things they're familiar with," he says. "But on TikTok, if you can get some traction with creators, that's one of the ways you can break out with a new book."

Author Cindy Callaghan is looking to test her hand at TikTok marketing for this very reason. The author—known for her 2010 teen fantasy *Just Add Magic* (later adapted into a 2015 Amazon series)—hopes her latest holiday release, *The Girl Who Ruined Christmas*, can take advantage of BookTok's reach.

"I'm not planning to make my own content for TikTok," she says. "Quite frankly, the content that's already there is so good, I don't know that I could compete."



The quality
of impressions
is much more
important to me
than volume

—Cindy Callaghan, author



Instead, Callaghan spent months researching BookTok, searching for creators with a focus on tween content. She started following as many as she could to keep track of their videos and get a sense of their taste in books.

"I ended up reaching out to some BookTokers who didn't have big follower numbers because they felt like a really good fit. And, who knows—they might have more followers by the time my next book comes out," she says.

One factor that was make-or-break was that the creators' content was completely age-appropriate. Callaghan says she ended up removing some BookTokers from her shortlist because the language or content of some of their videos didn't feel like the right fit for her middle-grade audience.

Now that she has a list of strong candidates, Callaghan is putting together packages with a copy of *The Girl Who Ruined Christmas*—along with a number of holiday-themed items creators can use to make their videos more festive—in the hopes that the BookTokers will choose to review the title or include it on a reading list. The packages are set to arrive soon so that any potential content can go up ahead of the peak holiday shopping period in November and early December.

"I'm not measuring success in terms of impressions. The quality of impressions is much more important to me than volume," Callaghan says. "I think I'll have to weigh the effort versus return in terms of how it performs compared to other social media platforms or more traditional marketing efforts. But it has the potential to be a really nice bang for the buck."

The true value of BookTok, though, is the love for reading it's encouraging in tweens and teens, Callaghan says. TikTok is one tool in her marketing toolkit, but she hopes that the attention (and cash) from the publishing industry doesn't corrupt the genuine excitement of kids sharing the books they love best.

Adamo also hopes that authors, publishers and booksellers continue to respect BookTok's unique culture even as they leverage the platform for marketing purposes or provide inspiration for their next book-focused screen adaptation.

"When you have a trend like [what we're seeing right now with] TikTok, it's all about finding your place," he says. "How can we get in there without stomping on the creators?" **k**

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CARTOON NETWORK

Family represents

Creative Artists Agency focuses on the kids space as the entertainment industry works to establish new viewing habits with its youngest audiences.

BY: ELIZABETH FOSTER

Thanks to the strength and reliability of the kids industry even in the most turbulent times, LA-based entertainment and sports agency Creative Artists Agency (CAA)—perhaps best known for representing A-List stars like Julia Roberts and Brad Pitt—is setting content strategies for its family-focused clients into motion.

The pandemic has been tough on most industries, but the kids space is alright. Family movies like *Sonic the Hedgehog* (US\$319.7 million), *Doolittle* (US\$245.4 million) and *The Croods: A New Age* (US\$215.9 million) were some of the top-grossing films globally in 2020, while titles such as *Cruella* (US\$222.1 million) and *Jungle Cruise* (US\$186.9 million) have dominated the box office so far this year.

Data from market research firm The NPD Group, meanwhile, shows that global toy sales reached US\$94.7 billion in 2020 (an increase of 2.6% compared to pre-pandemic 2019). And those numbers are only continuing to grow, increasing 15% to US\$22.45 billion in the first half of 2021 compared to the same period the previous year.

Whether they're learning at home or at school, sticking close to their families or playing with friends—children will always look to content and consumer products for comfort. So in these uncertain times, the kids industry is the place to be.

While CAA has repped family-focused properties in the past—the agency inked agreements with The Tiny Chef and Beano Studios in 2018 and 2019, respectively—it sees the kids space as much more significant opportunity post-pandemic, says agent Barry Kotler.

In August, Jazwares announced CAA would represent plush brand Squishmallows



CAA represents Squishmallows across film, TV, video games, publishing and live touring

across categories including film, television, video games, publishing and live touring. Since it launched in 2017, the brand has grown to encompass roughly 1,000 characters, with some big-ticket licenses among them (there's a Baby Yoda and a Chewbacca, natch). And in June, Jazwares launched the Moonbug-produced animated YouTube series *Squishville*, with new episodes premiering through to the end of this month. CAA will expand these content efforts moving forward.

"Squishmallows is a massive consumer products business, but it doesn't have a content strategy," says Kotler. "That's what we're starting to talk about—how to work with the brand to build content for existing product lines as well as upcoming ranges."

The focus, Kotler says, will be on creating content that is soft, comforting, and leaves kids feeling as safe as they do when they're tucked into bed with their favorite Squishmallow plushie.

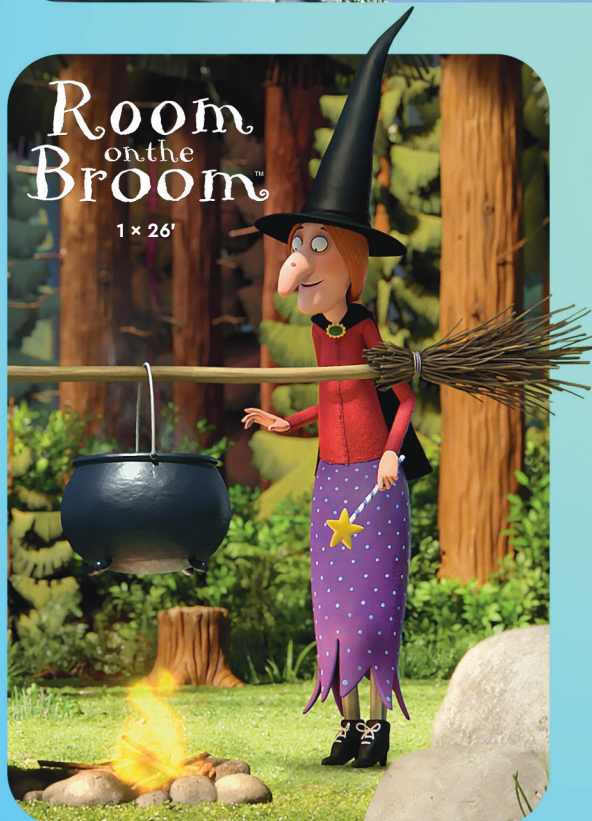
CAA is also developing strategies for other kid-focused clients. For London-based Beano Studios, which represents comics originally launched in 1938, the agency is in the process of assessing various characters to determine how they might be updated for screens both big and small. Imagine Kids

& Family, meanwhile, invested in Tiny Chef a year before Nickelodeon ordered stop-motion series *The Tiny Chef Show* (working title) in August 2020, and CAA is helping to grow the property's content plans moving forward.

"We're in a moment in the industry when each of the big corporate media companies are treating their IPs as four-walled gardens," Kotler says. "They're trying to control the direct-to-consumer relationship through their platforms and create new viewing habits with young audiences and then grow with those viewers. Those young audiences and their families will help fuel the success of their platforms. We see this as an opportunity."

The past 18 months have certainly altered the way kids connect with content—including increases in co-viewing and the takeover of short-form content like TikTok videos—and it's showing no signs of slowing down. As the landscape changes and as viewing habits continue to evolve, Kotler sees family-focused IPs as poised for the kind of multi-category success that primetime content just isn't supprting.

"I think family brands have the ability to push into innovation," he says. "Kids and family brands have the ability to take advantage of all corners of the agency." **K**

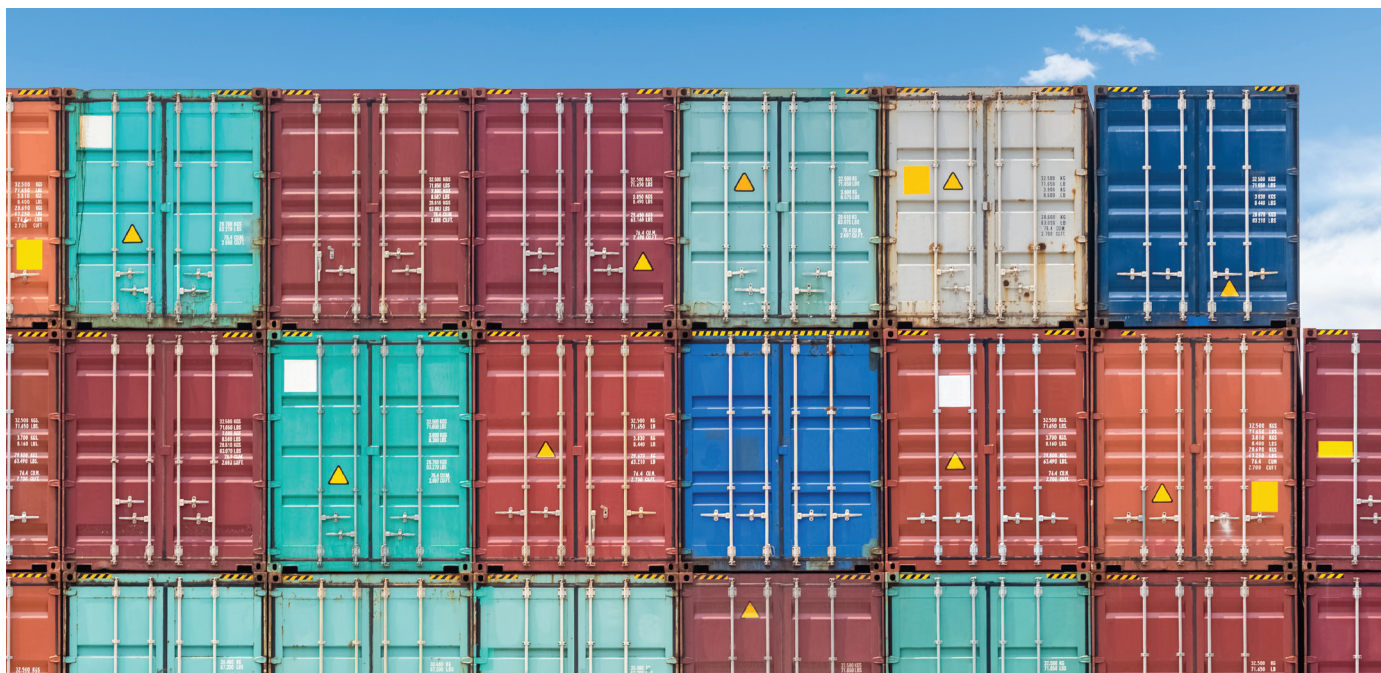


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Ships in the night

Growing consumer demand has outstripped the shipping industry's capacity, leading to delays and price increases in the lead-up to the 2021 holiday season. So what are toycos to do?

BY: ELIZABETH FOSTER

In a world accustomed to same-day shipping, waiting is not something most consumers are used to. But ongoing disruptions to the supply chain have caused major delays for the shipping industry, and it's looking like kids could be waiting a while for their toys to arrive this holiday season.

"There is more demand than there is supply," says Mark Szakonyi, executive editor for The Journal of Commerce, a division of IHS Markit.

According to data from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, around 80% of global trade, by volume, is carried by sea. But because of border restrictions, lack of space on ships and logjams at ports worldwide, deliveries are being delayed, and prices are up.

In August, Swiss global transport and logistics company Kuehne+Nagel reported that 353 container ships were stuck outside various international ports. Logistics platform project44, meanwhile, has reported that

delays for ships operating the route between China and non-West Coast ports in the US increased to 2.44 days in July 2021, up from 0.6 days for the same month in 2020.

Compounding these issues, the industry faced several major obstructions this year. In March, the MV Ever shipping container became wedged across Egypt's Suez Canal, blocking all traffic in the major waterway for six days.

And in June and August, services were temporarily shut down at major shipping hubs in China as the Delta variant continued to spread globally.

All of this has caused prices to rise at an alarming rate. In the past, Szakonyi says shippers would pay a rate of around US\$4,000 per FEU. (The forty-foot equivalent unit, or FEU, is the measurement of volume of a 40-foot-long shipping container.) In recent months, however, he says shippers have been paying upwards of US\$27,000 per FEU—a whopping 575% increase.

"Shippers are bidding up the market [in an attempt to get their products transported], and the container lines are adding surcharges and different premiums that you have to buy in order to get your cargo onto the shipment. Shippers that already have contracts with their container line—they've signed a contract for this cargo—are finding they can't get their allocations honored because the demand is overwhelming," he says.

If toymakers and their licensing partners aren't working extra time into their supply chains, they will have to spend even more money on ground transport to get those products to their destinations on time or risk losing sales, Szakonyi explains. And as hectic as the months leading up to the holiday season will be, he predicts the first quarter of 2022 will be equally stressful for the industry as toymakers and retailers struggle to restock their inventories.

"Based on the forecasts from analysts, we are expecting there to be elevated import volumes through early 2022. I wouldn't be surprised if it goes throughout the whole year," Szakonyi says. "Even if there is a slowdown in consumer demand, the amount of inventory that needs to be rebuilt means that importing will continue to be strong. I think the pressures will hopefully lessen in terms of capacity being outstripped by demand, but I think it's pretty safe to say that the pressures will continue throughout next year." **k**

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BANDWAGON

Product trends on the road to retail

Putting the 'fun' in non-fungible

Chris Byrne, president of Byrne Communications, explores NFTs to see which companies are jumping on the bandwagon, and whether these digital collectibles will be a lasting trend.



WARNER BROS.

NFT Non-fungible tokens (NFTs) are unique pieces of virtual content—like artwork or music—with ownership details stored on a digital ledger (block-chain). The market value of NFTs tripled to US\$250 million last year, and IP owners in the kids space are taking notice. In July, ahead of the premiere of *Space Jam: A New Legacy*, Warner Bros. bowed a limited collection of Space Jam NFTs.

OMG So are NFTs a collectible craze with long-term legs like Pokémon cards, or will they fizzle like Beanie Babies? “It will be fascinating to see how they’re treated and how they’ll be displayed,” says Chris Byrne. “There will be people who are smitten with the concept—collectors who will purchase NFTs as investments, buying them today and holding them for 10 to 15 years like you would a stock. And there will be a whole ancillary industry around how you display these things.”



MATTEL

QUALITY While big names have already jumped on the bandwagon, the trend's collectible status will depend on how it's handled by toycos, says Byrne. Mattel, for one, launched three exclusive Hot Wheels NFTs in June. The digital vehicles (the Twin Mill, Deora II and Bone Shaker) were offered up at auction on the Mattel Creations e-commerce platform, with one fetching the equivalent of US\$14,000. It was a success, and the toyco announced its intention to turn other brands into NFTs later this year.

QUANTITY “The staying power depends largely not on the NFT itself, but on the property. NFTs are here now, and they’re probably here to stay, but the question is how many will be generated? Is every Hot Wheels car going to have an NFT?” After all, he explains, Mattel has created more than 25,000 unique die-cast Hot Wheels models over the years. “If so, what’s the value of that? But, if they’re limited edition or something that’s really rare, it’s possible to create value in the long term.”



WILDBRAIN

CONSUME WildBrain, for its part, sold a one-of-a-kind Teletubbies-themed coin as an NFT in an effort to raise money for Kids Help Phone. And while the kidco isn't investing in the digital trend long term, many others are keen on NFTs because they're so easily produced. “It's not like you have to build molds, and you're not dealing with shipping. You can create a unique digital file, and I'm sure the smart people at these major toymakers have found a way to mass-produce those as well,” says Byrne.

COLLECT And even though consumers can't hold these collectibles in their hands, Byrne notes that they understand NFTs are “a one-of-a-kind thing they own, and they get the emotional benefit of that collectible moment.” Ultimately, each toyco and IP owner will have to determine if the relative low cost of production is worth the risk of investing in what could be the next flash-in-the-pan collectible craze.

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Friend-zoned

How the pandemic has turned parents into “peer-ents,” and what it means for content producers.

BY: WYNNE TYREE

Across recent generations, there has been an evolution in parenting styles—from Boomers who tended to be strict disciplinarians who demanded respect, to Gen Z parents raising their children with a more permissive, egalitarian and friend-like approach.

Since 2009, Smarty Pants has tracked these shifts in an effort to monitor the ongoing evolution. Annually, thousands of US parents of children ages six to 12 have been asked, “On a scale of one to 10, where ‘one’ represents a strict, authoritarian style and ‘10’ represents a permissive, friend-like style, how would you classify your parenting style?”

The data confirms a slow, steady change is afoot. Over the past decade, the number of parents claiming to be strict/authoritarian has declined from 26% in 2011 to 18% in 2015, and

just 10% in 2019. At the same time, the number of parents who say they are permissive/friend-like more than doubled between 2011 and 2019, and then nearly doubled again by 2021.

The pandemic push

This parenting evolution was kicked into hyperdrive when the COVID-19 pandemic hit American families. Moms and dads underwent a dramatic parenting shift last year, with 30% reporting they employed a friendly style (up from 19% the year before). By 2021, 37% of parents of kids and tweens said they are, essentially, their child’s friend and “peer-ent.”

This spike in parents being permissive is true regardless of the gender or age of the child. Whether they have boys or girls, little kids or tweens, between 34% and 40% of

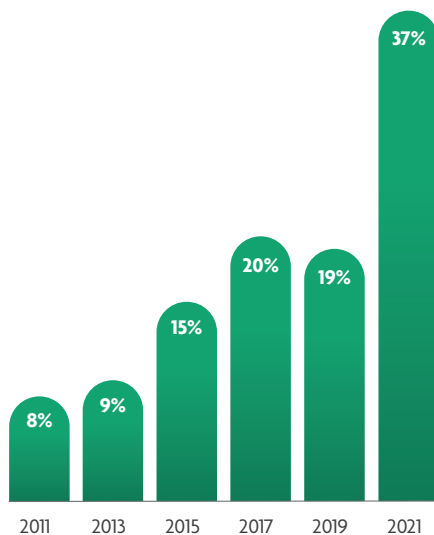
parents say they are friend-like in their style, with little statistical difference across comparable subgroups.

Home is where the heart (and school and work and playtime) is

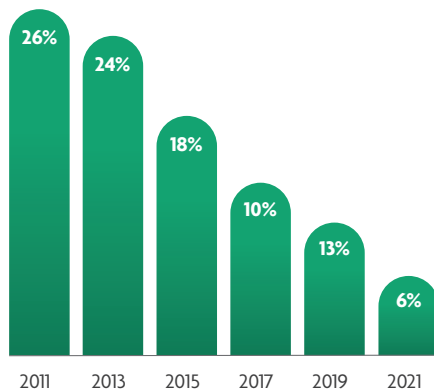
The pandemic forced parents into new roles as schools became virtual (or hybrid), structured activities were cancelled, and social get-togethers were limited. Not only did they become surrogate teachers and backyard coaches; parents also became playmates, confidantes and, perhaps, “besties.”

Moms and dads have leaned into that closeness—board games were dusted off and co-consumption of content soared—in an effort to pass the time and reconnect during what parents thought was a temporary pause.

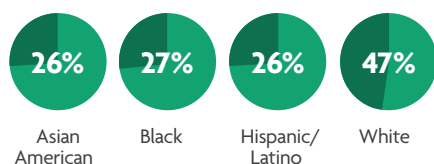
Percentage of US parents with a permissive/friend-like parenting style



Percentage of US parents with a strict/authoritarian parenting style



Percentage of US parents with a permissive/friend-like parenting style by race, ethnicity



But a year later in the spring of 2021, the majority of school-aged children were still learning (at least sometimes) from home. In fact, only 35% of parents reported that their children were learning at school.

Additionally, more parents have been home overall. In 2021, only 52% of parents work outside the home, compared to 64% in 2019. Home time continues to dominate family time.

Given all of this extra interaction, it's not surprising that parent-child closeness appears to have "stuck" as the pandemic drags on. Schools remain in flux, and activities are still on pause. Social time with other kids has been replaced by more and more time at home and with parents. From mom-initiated basketball games in the driveway, to second-graders teaching dads the "new rules" of UNO, inter-family play is at an all-time high.

Income matters

A parent's likelihood to be in the friend zone dramatically increases with household income.

While this was true in a slight way a decade ago, the gap between parenting styles based on income has widened dramatically in recent years.

In 2021, 53% of those who make more than US\$100,000 per year report a friendly style. Only 34% of those who have a household income of US\$50,000 to US\$100,000 say the same, and even fewer (just 24%) of those who make less than US\$50,000 agree. Resources clearly lead to leniency, while feeling restricted—perhaps by money, time, or both—tends to yield strictness. After all, who has time to horse around or go grocery shopping together when a parent may be working until 10 p.m. or feeling stressed about paying bills?

Culture matters, too

Race and ethnicity also influence the likelihood of being a peer-ent. While household income undoubtedly plays a role, there are also clear cultural differences in parenting styles that the pandemic has broadened.

In 2021, nearly 50% of white parents say they are permissive and friend-like. Half as many (26%) parents of color report the same. Qualitative data suggests that this is partially

because parents of color place a greater emphasis on deference and rule-following as a means of safeguarding their children and setting them up for success. They also have a heightened awareness of how their child's negative behavior can be perceived by the world and work against them.

Looking ahead

As parents begin to return to their out-of-home offices, and kids return to in-school learning, it's unlikely that parenting behaviors and attitudes will revert back to pre-lockdown dynamics entirely. The pandemic left many parents feeling that life's too short, and they want to have fun and enjoy themselves with their children. It has also encouraged many to shift their priorities in favor of soaking up family moments and making memories. For others, there is a heightened awareness of and sensitivity to their child's emotional wellness, leading parents to take a gentler, friend-like approach in an effort to combat their child's sense of loneliness or anxiety.

The continuing shift in parenting styles impacts families' relationships with media, programming and brands. Gone are the days of authoritarian parents whose sole job is to punish and govern.

Today's adults also aren't the goofy, butt-of-the-joke characters that have been depicted by the media in the past.

Maintaining authenticity will involve content with parent-child relationships that reflect the shift toward a more level, friend-like approach—with nuanced degrees of permissiveness based on income and culture.

As parents enjoy opportunities to spend time with their kids, content that pleases both will be a must for the rise in co-viewing. Keeping a pulse on the parenting style that has evolved over the past decade and the peer-ent trend that has accelerated over the past year will be instrumental for establishing relevance with families today and in the future. **K**

Data are derived from the company's annual Brand Love study of more than 9,500 US families' attitudes, behaviors and brand affinities.

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What kids want

Aspirational or familiar? Frenetic or soothing? How kids pick what to watch depends greatly on their mood.

BY: MAXINE FOX

Kids are driven by two motivating factors when it comes to choosing what to watch—who they're watching with, and how they're feeling in the moment.

Who they're watching with is relatively self-explanatory: Are kids tuning into a show solo, or are they sitting down with their friends or family to enjoy a group experience? This decision point has implications for the type of shows they watch, and also the

devices or settings in which they consume that content.

But this shared-versus-individual choice doesn't live in a vacuum. Kids often pick content based on whether they want to wind up (excited, intrigued) or wind down (calmed, comforted).

These might be subconscious decisions—such as choosing to watch a show before bed because it's a night-time ritual—but they

ultimately shape the types of content kids choose to turn on.

In the end, our research finds that most popular kids shows sit somewhere between these four tensions, satisfying different needs along the way. Ultimately, producers should think of each of these tensions as a quadrant. And where a kid's mood falls within those quadrants will determine the best type of content to fulfill their needs in the moment.

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Together versus solo

In our recent “Kids and the Screen” study, respondents cited spending time with family (79%) and friends (79%) as the top reason to watch something, followed closely by wanting to have alone time (72%).

Streamers such as Netflix (61%) and Disney+ (53%) were the go-to platforms for shared viewing, with 69% of respondents saying they watched these with other people. SVOD content that resonated the most were shows and movies that provide a feel-good shared viewing experience—such as *Toy Story* and *Star Wars*—something that has been lacking due to cinema closures throughout the pandemic.

Two-thirds of US kids also reported watching linear TV with family. Despite a steady decline in viewership over the past few years, traditional television is making a comeback with light-hearted competition shows like *America's Got Talent* and *The Masked Singer* providing something for the entire family to enjoy.

When it comes to the 72% of kids who turned to content for alone time, YouTube was by far the platform of choice, with 75% of kids going there to watch content that was just for them. YouTube is more of an individual experience because it's most frequently watched on portable devices (78%), and also because its content more easily reflects children's passions and personal hobbies like music videos and gaming. Ultimately, with its vast variety of options, YouTube provides niche content that's just for them.

Wind up versus wind down

A large number of kids said they tune into a show to be wound up and generate a feeling—this could be humor (60%) or excitement (47%)—that infuses their day with something new.

Dynamic content offers characters who tend to have cool powers (29%), save the day (20%) and beat the bad guys (19%). There is something frenetic, lively and energetic about these shows that draw kids in—and often their families, too. This content does particularly well on VOD platforms, and top dynamic shows viewed on streamers include *PAW Patrol* (19%), *Teen Titans Go!* (19%), *Raya and the Last Dragon* (4%) and *PJ Masks* (3%).

Aspirational content, meanwhile, explores different talents that people have, and the glamorous lives they lead. It's an opportunity



to daydream and live through others. Kids who enjoy watching these shows appreciate the excitement (47%) and the talented nature of the characters (24%).

YouTube satisfies kids' desire for aspirational content by providing a window into over-the-top celebrity life, while also allowing viewers to see “normal” people just like themselves living out their dreams. Music videos from the likes of Justin Bieber and Olivia Rodrigo are among kids' top aspirational content choices, as well as YouTubers such as JoJo Siwa and Kids Diana Show.

Wind-down viewing, on the other hand, gives kids an outlet to de-stress. The majority of children surveyed said they view content as part of their daily routine (76%) or something to have on in the background (66%), while 41% said they watch TV as a way to relax before bed.

Alternative shows feature weird and wonderful universes that are full of funny and silly characters and the everyday mischief they get up to. They allow kids to escape their everyday lives and travel to another place. This content is light-hearted and worry-free. Kids reported enjoying its silliness (28%) and weird characters (15%) the most.

Familiar shows are characterized by humor (60%), family themes (25%) and the relatability of the main character (15%). This type of content provides trusted and predictable storylines that kids can rely on, so watching it is extremely easy.

Collision versus co-existence

We cannot satisfy all kid needs at the same time, so producers should identify which one

is the driving force behind their IP in order to determine whether winding up/winding down or solo/shared should dictate where their content lives.

But where do these four tensions collide? Is all family content watched on linear TV? Are all aspirational shows watched on YouTube?

Of course not. Content that really succeeds in capturing kids' attention will often cross-pollinate elements from more than one quadrant to satisfy an entire moment.

For example, while familiar content is most often watched at home on linear TV with the whole family, it also has a place on YouTube, where kids often seek out something comforting after a long day. And although aspirational content—offering a window into glamorous worlds—works remarkably well on YouTube (the bastion of solo content consumption), it also has the power to draw in the entire family, as evidenced by shows like *America's Got Talent* and *The Masked Singer*.

But what takes precedent? The need for an individual moment, or the desire to be “wound up” and excited? Ultimately, that's for producers to decide. **K**

“Kids and the Screen: Changing the Channel” was conducted in the US in June, 2021. The survey polled 2,000 kids between two and 12, exploring their viewing habits across both linear and digital platforms.

MAXINE FOX is managing director at Giraffe Insights.

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Social shopping

To stand out in the crowded e-commerce market and better engage kids who expect video and social interactions across all touchpoints, companies are blending content and tech with online shopping experiences.

BY: RYAN TUCHOW

In the crowded world of e-commerce, kidcos that want to stand out with families need to go beyond static websites listing products to create more value with socially driven experiences.

That's Grom Social Enterprises' goal as it expands into e-commerce for the first time with its upcoming Santa.com launch. The company plans to support the site with content and Grom Social—a kid-friendly social media platform that lets 25 million-plus users share short videos and art.

Launching in November, Santa.com will feature holiday-themed personalized products, curated gift catalogues, games and original short videos to tap into the enduring love kids and families have for Christmas, says Paul Ward, president of social media and EVP of enterprises at Grom Social Enterprises.

Because it's an e-commerce site for ages 13 and under, it has to be rooted in safety, and Grom is working with certification service KidSAFE on the website's privacy features. Kids will be able to play games and access content without having to register, and parental consent will be required if they are asked to submit any personal identifying information.

Through the North Pole-themed site, kids can add items to a wishlist and then email it to their parents, but they themselves won't be able to make purchases. Grom is assembling a roster of e-tail partners to build out a catalogue of products parents can buy without needing to navigate to a third-party platform.

Kids can also visit with Santa, take a tour of the North Pole, and see a list of things they can do to stay on the nice list—which they're encouraged to share on their Grom Social account.

Original short-form content, such as elves unboxing presents, will also be made available on the social site, paving the way for future content.

Grom is developing an animated musical film (also called *Santa.com*) with German studio Toon2Tango that will deliver ahead of the 2023 holidays. Eventually, the special will air on Grom Social to drive kids back to the e-commerce site, with the aim of making both the site and the animated feature annual traditions for kids.

"There's opportunity for synergy between the website and Grom Social where kids can share the products they get with others. And in the case of the Santa.com special, we

can use it to fortify Grom Social with new holiday content,” says Ward.

The hope is to create a stress-free experience for families during the busy holiday season—a place to both gather and watch festive fare, and get gift-buying done more easily, he says.

While platforms like TikTok, Instagram and WeChat have made efforts to turn their platforms into shopping hubs, the kids industry hasn’t hit on the right e-commerce/social media blend yet. Grom sees itself at the forefront of this content/tech/social melting pot and wants to create social commerce (or s-commerce) that’s fun and engaging for kids.

Looking forward, Ward says Grom could use this s-commerce/content approach with other brands including preschool-skewing Baldwin, about a young train trying to reunite with its family.

For example, the brand’s upcoming series could live on Grom Social, with new content and games on a dedicated branded retail website, creating e-commerce ecosystems.

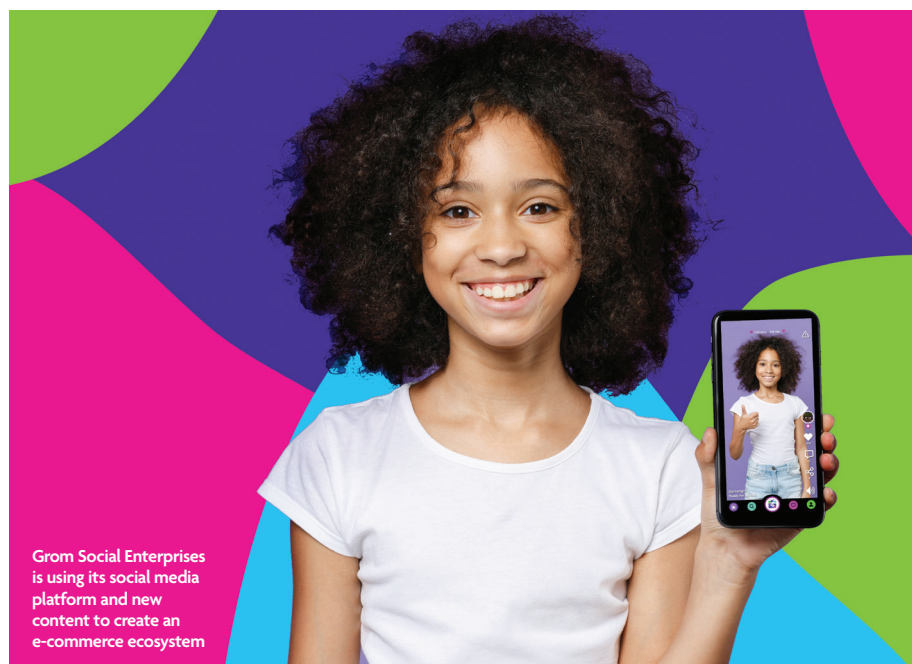
The shift to s-commerce is taking off on platforms for older audiences. TikTok recently teamed up with Shopify to let creators make shoppable videos; Instagram and YouTube have been piloting buying functionality since 2017 and 2020, respectively; and WeChat unveiled its shoppable options in 2020.

A rise in live-streamed content is also set to drive consumer spending in social apps up from US\$6.78 billion in 2021 to US\$17.2 billion by 2025, according to the mobile data firm App Annie.

Kids are looking for an engaging social shopping experience as well, so some kidcos are going beyond static websites and passive-viewing experiences like unboxing videos to build more interactive approaches, particularly as more kids (and their parents) buy products online.

While the trend towards social commerce was happening well before the pandemic, lockdowns accelerated the shift of family shopping away from brick-and-mortar stores and towards e-commerce, says Fallon Anawalt, president of Athena Marketing & Advertising. It’s a wake-up call for other businesses to follow the lead of companies like Grom and deliver on what kids want—an interactive and social experience, she says.

Many kids really embraced virtual shopping throughout the pandemic, with 23% of UK youth saying they made a lot of online



purchases during lockdowns, according to Childwise. (The UK-based research firm surveyed more than 1,400 kids between September and October 2020.)

And while 12% of respondents said they don’t have their own credit/debit card, and 10% said their parents won’t let them buy things online, plenty began shopping with their families even though they weren’t the ones spending money.

Eight in 10 US kids drove purchasing decisions and influenced movie and video game purchases as families searched for activities they could do together, according to UK-based research firm Super Awesome, which surveyed 502 kids and tweens last July. Even if kids aren’t making the purchase, they still tend to influence it.

As children gain more control over their parents’ wallets—and increasingly spend time online—shopping will inevitably transfer to social sites, says Anawalt.

Gen Alphas, in particular, expect to see videos and interactivity from marketers and e-commerce sites, says Sophie Abrahamsson, chief commercial officer of live-video shopping platform Bambuser.

The Swedish techco, which has traditionally targeted Millennial shoppers, builds in-video shopping streams for businesses. Presenters can use the Bambuser app to live-stream themselves showcasing new products in videos, which can then be simulcast on social media platforms and also

live as evergreen content on the company’s e-commerce website.

The videos feature a chat function inviting consumers to react in real time, and they can purchase items directly through the stream. Consumers typically spend 13 minutes on its videos, three times longer than the average time spent on e-commerce sites, she says.

Bambuser’s tech has been used by Adidas, Samsung and Tommy Hilfiger, and it was recently selected for the Disney Accelerator program—which connects techcos to mentors from the House of Mouse—on the strength of a pilot project in development with Disney that blends the conglomerate’s storytelling skills with shoppable videos.

The next step for social commerce is to get the tech into the hands of kids and kidfluencers so they can make unboxing videos and sharing products with their friends more fun, says Abrahamsson.

It’s a natural next step for influencers, and could be an effective tool for them, too. Almost half (44%) of Gen Z made a purchase decision in 2020 based on a recommendation from a social influencer, according to data from researcher Kantar.

“This is adding value to your content and can live as more interactive tutorials or videos that fit naturally on your social media channels,” Abrahamsson says. “If I was a retailer, and knew I had a video tool for engaging kids, I’d ask them what they wanted to see and what they could do with it.” **K**

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THE NEW WORLD ORDER

Classic linear TV has been dominated by 52 x 11-minute and 26 x half-hour formats for many years. But the way kids watch content—along with the devices they use—has changed dramatically. That evolution has only intensified in recent months, and now bingeing an entire season on Netflix in one day is considered as normal as only watching two-minute clips on YouTube.

Not to be left behind, prodcos are breaking the mold with new formats. Short-order seasons around 10 episodes long are emerging as the new normal, while anthologies are growing in popularity with streaming platforms. *Kidscreen* chatted with experts from across the industry to examine the strategies behind these new models and how they may shape the kids content landscape for years to come.

SHORT-ORDER TELEVISION

Seasons are getting shorter, and the 52 x 11-minute format is no longer the industry standard, which has wide-reaching repercussions in the kids entertainment ecosystem. But some production companies have found some upside to this new normal.

BY: ALEXANDRA WHYTE



Each episode of *Detention Adventure* ends on a cliffhanger to increase bingeability

This summer, DreamWorks Animation released the second season of *Gabby's Dollhouse* on Netflix, and it was just 10 episodes long. It's the 27th kids series DreamWorks has made for the streamer, and it's a departure from the partnership's roots. When DreamWorks' first original kids series *Turbo Fast* premiered on the SVOD in 2013, the order was for 26 episodes—a volume that has been the traditional standard in kids TV, thanks to linear scheduling.

The 52 x 11-minute format (or 26 x half hours, depending on how you slice it) has offered a lot of comfort over the years. It's an assurance for toy companies and retailers of entertainment longevity. It's a job guarantee for behind-the-scenes and on-camera talent. And it

(often) results in a consistent and steady stream of cash flowing back to the producers.

But that's not how kids are watching TV anymore.

"We've been a part of all this experimentation, and the learning that has gone on over the last number of years when kids exploded onto the SVOD scene," says Teri Weiss, head of preschool at DreamWorks Animation. "SVODs are always learning and are very data-driven, so there's a lot of information that they're garnering in terms of kids' ever-changing viewing habits."

To keep up with these rapid shifts in audience behavior, broadcasters and SVODs have scaled back on how much content they're



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ordering—and releasing—at a time. Rather than parsing out 52 episodes over the course of months, streamers are more likely to drop a batch of 10 episodes all at once, and then bring the series back for a 10-episode “second” season six to eight months later. Since *Turbo Fast* was released, DreamWorks Animated Television’s shows have rarely exceeded 13 episodes per season; and in the last year, all of its new seasons have ranged from six to 15 episodes.

In 2016, SVODs in the US and UK ordered an average of 18 episodes of a kids show per season, according to Ampere Analysis. That number dropped to 13.9 episodes in 2020. And for original commissions, the median is even lower at just 7.5 episodes per season in 2020.

So how can a company entrenched in a 52 x 11-minute approach adapt? Several content producers have switched up their business models to accommodate this changing format demand. They’ve found that it is possible to sustain a business based on shorter seasons by creating additional content released elsewhere to maintain viewership, trying more experimental shows that never would have been greenlit before, and using shorter seasons as an opportunity to keep staff together between renewals and prevent burnout.

A question that producers of short-order seasons are facing, however, is whether these new formats can have the same impact as the traditional 52-ep standard. Will kids remember a show as easily without the frequent refreshment that’s possible with a bigger-volume order? That’s the million-dollar question, and Atomic Cartoons CCO Matthew Berkowitz thinks the answer is—just like the basic principle taught in improv classes—“yes, and...”

While traditional linear channels have long been favored by producers looking to build a franchise, Atomic Cartoons ultimately chose Netflix for its first original series *Last Kids on Earth*. Based on a graphic novel of the same name, the show launched with a 66-minute special on the streamer. Seven months later came 10 episodes, technically as a second-season order, followed by another 10 episodes in a third season six months after that. The eps were popular and made Netflix’s Top-10 list in multiple countries a number of times. But that short-order episode count isn’t enough to build a brand, says Berkowitz.

To boost awareness, Atomic partnered with Finnish studio Giggiebug on several animated shorts, which were released on YouTube in the lead-up to the Netflix premiere, so fans of the book series would know it was coming. Atomic also partnered with Popcorn Digital and YouTube Kids to release more shorts on the AVOD around the season three launch. Those videos—which total 30 minutes of live-action and animated content—have 14,500 subscribers, three million views, and importantly, acted as an additional entry point to interest kids in watching the show on Netflix.

This led to a master toy partnership with Jakks Pacific and a video game from Outright Games, which helped even more kids discover the series. Atomic paid for the additional content itself, and while it declined to share numbers, the company recommends all producers set aside “a few hundred thousand dollars” to cover ancillary content for short-order shows with franchise and licensing potential. (By contrast, a typical 11-minute episode costs between US\$150,000 and US\$200,000 to make, after tax credits and subsidies are applied, Berkowitz says.)

“As a production company, our big expenditure was the YouTube shorts. Then it was about putting in the time to be collaborative partners with everybody else in that universe to help support things and be a centralized point,” says Berkowitz. “It just kept steadily feeding and feeding the growth.”

Not all of the shows Atomic makes are destined to be franchises, though, and part of its growth strategy is to have a diversified pipeline that uses many different styles with varied storytelling techniques. In that case, fewer episodes actually means that many shows that never would have been greenlit previously are now on the table, says Berkowitz.

LoCo Motion Pictures, a small Toronto-based prodco, concurs. When CEO Lauren Corber founded the company in 2015, she originally assumed she’d make feature films

EUROPEAN BOTTLENECK



Before *Last Kids on Earth* became a show, it was a *New York Times* bestselling book series

Not everyone in the kids entertainment industry is eager to embrace new formats. Toy companies and retailers are among the slowest to change, and they have been very hesitant when it comes to snappier seasons, according to several producers we spoke with. This is especially true in Europe, where there’s a strong linear broadcast presence that is still picking up more traditional 52 x 11-minute shows.

“The [European toy companies and retailers] still prefer the big audiences, the daily exposure and the regularly scheduled time periods over on-demand platforms,” says Atomic Cartoons CCO Matthew Berkowitz.

Since European markets prefer shows on linear that have a plethora of audience data to back up their success (unlike SVODs), Berkowitz says that YouTube stats and having an existing property as the underlying IP are crucial for a producer to prove that the brand has on-shelf potential in the region.

For *Last Kids on Earth*, the show alone wasn’t enough to bring on European toyco and retailers. Atomic focused first on building up the brand in the US, where consumer products partners were more accepting of the SVOD model. Once Jakks Pacific was on board, it was easier to bring its US success story—in combination with the YouTube stats—to Europe and get retailers there on board. Hopefully in the future, it won’t take so much convincing, he says.

“As the SVOD numbers go up—and I don’t just mean with the big platforms, I mean even as the linear broadcasters get more into digital—I think we’re going to steadily see toy companies and retailers recognizing that viability,” says Berkowitz.

—Alexandra Whyte



Tencent Kids Originals



THE DROP ON DROPS



An episode of *Gabby's Dollhouse* launched on YouTube before its Netflix premiere to drum up interest

Devotion to a brand is often fostered over years of repeat viewing, but the binge-watching trend has thrown a wrench into traditional franchise-building strategies. Consuming an entire 10-episode season in a single sitting and then moving on can render the experience entirely forgettable—no matter how good the show is. To build it into a popular IP, prodcos need to find new ways of engaging audiences.

For DreamWorks Animation Television, the solution was more—more content, more touchpoints, more chances to connect.

“We call it ‘always on’ content,” says head of preschool Teri Weiss. In order to maintain momentum in between season launches, and continually stay in front of its audience, DreamWorks supplements its series with YouTube content.

Netflix and DreamWorks released the first episode of *Gabby's Dollhouse* on YouTube eight months before its premiere, where it has since racked up 12 million views. After the YouTube launch, the team started to identify important elements that worked well—like music, DIY and baking—and turned them into unique additional content for the AVOD.

The channel boasts 174,000 subscribers, and is now populated with nursery rhyme videos, songs from the show, and funny compilations, with audiences ultimately redirected back to Netflix to watch the core show.

YouTube videos were regularly released between seasons to keep kids engaged with fresh content, and test new ideas.

“We thought *Gabby's Dollhouse* had the potential to be a big franchise for us,” says Weiss. “[The YouTube content] was about experimenting with the ways we can engage with the youngest audience as early as possible.” —

Alexandra Whyte

due to the difficulties of funding a series. While she didn't end up making a single movie, she has built a business entirely on producing shows that have fewer than 10 episodes per season. This includes *Detention Adventure*—the first original kids series for CBC Gem, the Canadian pubcaster's SVOD—which now has three 10-ep seasons.

“I think it would have been much more difficult to raise the financing for a longer production,” says Corber. “For *Detention Adventure*, in particular, this is the first series [the creators] made that has gone to camera, and it's harder to get a broadcaster to take a chance on someone new when there are much higher dollars at stake.”

Dedicating your entire pipeline to short-order seasons isn't easy, but it's possible. Corber has cobbled together financing from different Canadian funds, negotiated discounts with unions, and been successful with series greenlights—but she's had to have multiple series in production at a time to maintain a sustainable business, she says.

While short orders create a financial challenge, there are creative and talent upsidess. Mercury Filmworks VP of originals and co-productions Chantal Ling believes that focusing on traditional-length seasons can become a grind on a production team.

“It's a very long haul, and the burnout on a 52 x 11-minute show is real for your staff and for the artists who are churning it out over two years,” says Ling. “It has to be managed very well and focused on the creative, which is a lot more challenging with that many episodes from a team and studio perspective.”

Shorter formats, on the other hand, breed more creativity because team members are more likely to be excited about what they're working on and bring a fresh perspective to each scene. A typical 52 x 11-minute show takes around 18 to 24 months to produce, whereas a 13 x half-hour series is probably closer to 15 months, depending on the project's scope.

Having shorter seasons on some shows has saved Mercury Filmworks from becoming “a cookie-cutter factory,” says Ling. One project from its fledgling originals department, *Pangors of Puddle Peak*, will likely have a shorter format.

And on the service work side of its business, Silvergate Media's *Hilda* for Netflix had 13 episodes in both its first and second seasons, and its quick renewal helped Mercury keep the production team together from one to the next.

On a series with longer seasons, it's common to wait years in between renewals, meaning that much of the team moves on to other projects. But when there's only six months between shorter seasons, they can all keep working together and at least get into scripting—even if they only get a soft greenlight from partners—which is good for morale, says Ling. It can also breed its own kind of innovation and creativity.

“In theory, we should be able to get audience feedback quicker with a shorter order,” says Ling. “Sometimes you're waiting two to four years to get the next season out. But with a shorter order and schedule, you get to screen quicker, so you can pivot [if something isn't working].”

To maintain quality, keep staff happy and focus on that creativity, Ling acknowledges there can be financing challenges. The cost per episode is higher than on a 52 x 11-minute show, because a production company isn't able to amortize its costs over time. An intricate background, character or detail might only be used once in a short season rather than five times in a longer one. In response, Mercury seeks out co-production partners on several of its originals to share the financing load.

Does that mean the 52 x 11-minute format is dead? Before you start planning a funeral, there are still plenty of buyers eager to commission traditional full-length series, producers happy to make them, and toy companies chomping at the bit for the licensing rights. But while it's not quite done yet, there are some pretty solid benefits to trying out a new format.

“I think everybody is taking a look at content consumption and the way that's being digested nowadays, and we definitely find fewer 52 x 11-minute orders” says Atomic's Berkowitz. “There are certainly shows where we really hope that we could get that kind of order, but for the most part, we are seeing a shift away from that—even from the more conventional terrestrial linear broadcasters. I think we just have to realize, accept and adapt to the fact that [the industry] is transitioning.” **K**

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ANTHOLOGIES PICK UP STEAM

Producers are tapping into a growing demand for anthologies, resulting in more commissions and job opportunities. But these collective projects won't see the light of day—let alone second seasons—if they're only treated as one-offs.

BY: JEREMY DICKSON



"Tiny Santa's List" from RTÉ's holiday anthology *Shorts Yule Love* features characters from the Irish pubcaster's popular Turnip & Duck series *Critters TV*

Though buyers continue to lean into highly renewable, single-cast shows, the anthology format is starting to see some accelerated growth, thanks to a higher demand from streamers for nostalgic co-viewing content and bingeable short-form animation.

Seven new children's anthologies have been ordered by broadcasters since 2020, compared to only four the previous year, according to data from London-based market research firm Ampere Analysis.

This uptick has largely been driven by Disney+, which recently picked up animated anthology series *Kizazi Moto*, *Pixar Popcorn*, *Short Circuit*, *Sparkshorts* and *Zootopia+*, as well as the live-action horror-comedy compilation *Just Beyond*.

Other recent greenlights include Irish pubcaster RTÉ's animated Christmas anthology *Shorts Yule Love*, the BBC's unscripted teen monologue series *Sparks*, and WarnerMedia's upcoming HBO Max LatAm series *Frankelda's Book of Spooks* from Mexican stop-motion specialist Cinema Fantasma (*Victor & Valentino*).

Ampere's research doesn't include anthology series in development or reboots, and taking these into account, the total number of anthology projects in the works would increase by at least six. These include Nickelodeon's 2019 revival of its '90s anthology *Are You Afraid of the Dark?*, Steven Spielberg's AppleTV+ 2020 reboot of *Amazing Stories*, and an upcoming reimagining of '80s fantasy series *The Storyteller* from

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The Jim Henson Company and Fremantle. Beyond optimizing demand for nostalgia and bingeable shorts, the industry's interest in anthologies also ties into the need for more diverse content.

For example, more than 70 emerging directors and creators from across Africa were invited to pitch concepts for the 10 x 10-minute Disney+ original series *Kizazi Moto*. Before the final 10 shorts were selected, 15 shortlisted projects received mentoring from Oscar-winning director Peter Ramsey (*Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*) and the creative teams at Disney+ and its South African producing partner Triggerfish.

Missouri-based Lion Forge Animation—the studio behind Oscar-winning animated short *Hair Love*—is using a similar strategy for *Puerto Rico Strong* and *Black Comix Anthology* (working title). The

tween series *Puerto Rico Strong* will feature a new story from a different Puerto Rican creator in each standalone episode, and will mix genres including fantasy and sci-fi. Meanwhile, *Black Comix Anthology* is aimed at six- to 11-year-olds and will feature stories from Black creators around topics such as racial inequality and the Black experience.

With a new story from a different creator in every episode, the anthology format is an excellent tool to provide more opportunities for emerging talent from underserved communities, says Lion Forge president and co-founder Carl Reed.

“Until recently, there hasn’t been much kids content from Puerto Rico,” he says. “What better way to grow relationships with new talent than to add six to 10 pieces of different content in one go.”

In terms of budgets, Reed says every production is different, but if costs run up, producers shouldn’t forget to factor in the extra development value.

“Per episode, an animated anthology can be expensive. And as a collection, they generally cost around the same as much longer 52 x 11-minute or 10 x half-hour series,” he says. “But if you view a short anthology as additional development and not just a production on its own, it more than justifies any extra cost per episode, and is still doable within traditional budgets.”

“If an audience really relates to one of the shorts, and you fully intend the episodes to have lives beyond the shorts, anthologies are like development treasure chests for streamers,” he adds. “If [streamers] have first rights to additional exploitation, certain anthologies could really expand their dollars on the development side.”

One reason why producers might view animated anthologies as risky from a cost perspective is the fact that assets (i.e. characters, props, backgrounds) don’t necessarily get reused unless there is a recurring narrator or a character with a serialized storyline—known as a through-line.

As for episode counts and lengths, buyers have primarily been ordering smaller, short-form anthologies with episodes running anywhere from two to 12 minutes. Though Lion Forge has yet to determine an episode length for its series, Reed says he would love to see a return to the half-hour format. “With shorts, you get just enough to make you hungry, which is good, but you often don’t feel 100% satisfied,” he says. “You can do a lot in a half hour, or even an hour, going back to shows like *Twilight Zone*.”

Ireland’s RTÉ prefers a two-minute format for anthologies, says kids executive Eimear O’Mahony. “It seems to focus everyone, it’s not financially risky or time-consuming, and viewers are more likely to binge-watch short episodes,” she explains.

Unlike some anthologies that use characters as through-lines, RTÉ has relied solely on broader themes as a unifier in its series, including holiday



Lion Forge's *Puerto Rico Strong* is centered around a group of kids who discover a box of comics

As the central character, Frankelda has a rich backstory, which could be explored in later seasons, or even in a special or feature film



themed anthology *Shorts Yule Love* and an unnamed animated Halloween anthology that's currently in production. Both projects feature the work of a different Irish animation studio in each episode—Studio Meala, Turnip & Duck and Daily Madness, to name a few. And each one is presented as an indie short film without RTÉ credit boards or branding at the beginning. Forgoing these elements gave the animation companies more ownership of their shorts, and made it easier for them to be submitted to film festivals, says O'Mahony.

"When the anthology theme is so clear and obvious, you don't need that extra branding," she says. Leaving it out also lowered costs as fewer assets needed to be designed.

That being said, a through-line can be immensely helpful for a series in the long term. Mexico City-based Cinema Fantasma is using this strategy for its stop-motion series *Frankelda: Book of Spooks*, which is in the final stages of post-production. Created by brothers Arturo and Roy Ambriz, the five x 13-minute anthology will stream exclusively as an HBO Max Original later this year in Latin America. In each episode, the titular character presents a different creepy story from her magical book.

To give the show a better shot at multiple seasons, the creators devoted time to developing Frankelda's story arc. She provides consistency

and familiarity in order to keep kids watching episodes they might have otherwise skipped, says Jaime Jiménez Rión, VP of content strategy and original production for WarnerMedia Kids LatAm.

"Other anthologies [without through-lines] can be completely disconnected, and you might only enjoy two or three out of 10 episodes," Rión says. "Having a common element is better for kids to navigate and connect to the experience."

While Frankelda's main purpose is telling the stories in each episode, Roy Ambriz says there is so much material behind the character that the team could create an entire feature film focused on her backstory. To start, the show's fifth episode will delve a bit further into her life, a strategy that could carry over into new seasons, says Arturo Ambriz.

And because *Frankelda* is Cinema Fantasma's first original series, the brothers are also using it as a calling card to showcase more of their studio's capabilities. "The anthology works really well for us because we wanted to explore a lot of different monsters, characters, stories and aesthetics," says Roy Ambriz.

Adaptability and long-term strategy were two of the main things Rión appreciated about Cinema Fantasma's *Frankelda* pitch. "Along with their focus on relatable and appealing characters, I liked that they were already thinking about the show's universe, and how it could evolve," he says. "I'm not saying it will happen, but it could lead to a second season, a spinoff series or a movie."

If anthologies are successful, they lend themselves well to subsequent seasons because they are potentially infinite, and producers don't necessarily need to tie up a story arc like they would in a long-running series, says Ampere senior analyst Fred Black.

"It is kind of an easy decision to pick them up for another batch of episodes," he says.

"And you can tweak them halfway through, so it's easy to change from short form to a half hour, or split episodes into two. Their adaptability is key." **K**

Anthologies are like development treasure chests for streamers

—Carl Reed, Lion Forge

COOL NEW SHOWS!

BY: RYAN TUCHOW



7 and up

Aiko and the Masters of Time

Producers: Saturday Animation Studio (Canada)

Style: CG animation

Format: 10 x 22 minutes

Budget: US\$600,000 to US\$630,000 per episode

Status: In development, with a pitch bible, script and teaser available. Cookbook Media is handling distribution, and Saturday Animation is seeking broadcast partners.

Delivery: Q2 2023

In a modern sci-fi world where historic warriors from different eras exist together, two teens—a samurai and a cowboy—discover they have the power to travel through time. After young samurai Aiko decides to venture back to save her mom, the duo has to stay a step ahead of villainous forces that want to steal the time-traveling power for themselves. Guy Harvey, André Lavoie, Aaron Simpson, Fred Faubert and Louis-Simon Ménard co-created and co-developed this mystery series.

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6 to 10

GG Odyssey

Producer: TeamTO (France)

Style: CG animation

Format: 26 x 22 minutes

Budget: US\$11.6 million

Status: In development, with a bible available.

Delivery: Q1 or Q2 2023

When video gamer Kiran is mistaken for a mighty warrior, he's transported to the world of Greek mythology, where the gods and goddesses of Olympus task him with saving King Odysseus. To complete this quest, he teams up with the daughter of Hades and starts an adventure that takes them through a variety of legends. With podcaster Liv Albert (*Let's Talk About Myths, Baby!*) and author Fabian Clavel (*Panic in Mythology*) attached as consultants, the series will tap into a demand that TeamTO sees for kid-friendly stories focused on Greek mythology.



10 to 14

Zombra: Ghoul Detective

Producers: Sinking Ship Entertainment (Canada), Nelvana (Canada)

Style: Live action and CG animation

Format: 12 x 22 minutes

Budget: Not yet finalized

Status: In development, with a pitch deck and script completed. Now seeking broadcast partners.

Delivery: Q4 2022

Zombra is a Black-Latina teen girl who uses her special investigative talents to solve otherworldly mysteries. After her sister is kidnapped, Zombra has to find allies and take on new cases that bring her ever closer to finding her lost sibling. Jadel Dowlin (*Hero Elementary*, *Dino Dana*) created this supernatural mixed-media adventure series.

6 to 9



Rita Peters: 1.19 Meters

Producer: One Animation (Singapore)

Style: CG animation

Format: 26 x 11 minutes

Budget: US\$3.9 million

Status: In development, with a pitch deck available. One Animation is seeking co-production partners.

Delivery: Q4 2022

One Animation and Adam Redfern (*The Adventures of Paddington*) created this comedy-adventure series that stars Rita, a very small girl—3.9 feet tall to be exact—who discovers she has the power to bring the characters on her height chart to life. At first glance, it seems like these magical beings will solve all of Rita's problems, but it quickly becomes clear that they cause more trouble than they fix. Rita and her real life friends have to team up to help others, and ultimately learn that friendship is the only magic they need.

Ivy's Bookshop

Producers: Ink and Light (Ireland), Muste ja Valo (Finland)

Style: 2D animation

Format: 39 x seven minutes

Budget: US\$2.9 million

Status: In development, with a sample script and bible available. Now seeking broadcast and distribution partners.

Delivery: 2023

Created by Irish artist Joshua Hogan, this series centers around a young dyslexic dragon who dreams of adventure like the ones she reads about in books. But when Ivy discovers that she and her best friend have the power to visit magical worlds from her favorite stories, she gets the chance to explore fantastical new locations and meet amazing creatures that ultimately help her solve everyday problems.



Pet Shop Zombies

Producers: Epic Story Media (Canada), Alibi Pivotal Kids (Canada), Treason Media (Canada), Loomi Animation (Canada)

Style: 2D animation

Format: 20 x five minutes

Budget: US\$1 to US\$2 million

Status: In pre-production, with scripts and a first episode available. Currently seeking broadcasters.

Delivery: Q4 2022

In this fast-paced comedy, a pack of pet shop animals—who also happen to be zombies—struggle to bring order to the apocalypse. These cute undead animals have to work together to protect their shop and stop a pair of evil creatures from taking over the world.

WHO KNEW?



Dutch Features' **Francoise Nieto-Fong** takes a break from sales to find peace in...

PAPER



After more than a year in various states of lockdown, meeting family or friends for dinner at a restaurant has become a magical moment. This is especially true when you eat with Francoise Nieto-Fong, because after dessert she's likely to take your napkin and turn it into an intricately folded bird.

Nieto-Fong, director of sales and business development for Dutch Features Global Entertainment, started studying origami about 10 years ago. As a little girl, she and her sister would fold paper boats to float in their bathroom sink, and for years she wanted to learn how to create more complicated forms.

"There was always that fascination, but I never really had the time," she says. "Then, one New Year's Eve, my resolution was to fold a new figure every day. I got really into that."

Over the years, Nieto-Fong has learned new skills and tackled increasingly complicated projects. Recently, she folded a series of paper pumpkins for Halloween that could be inflated by blowing into them. While they were the most difficult thing she's ever attempted technically, Nieto-Fong says her pandemic project—folding a different paper bird each day—required a lot more discipline.

"I love origami because it's a mental exercise," she explains. "It forces you to [work] your memory and your creativity. I'll try to fold something, and then realize I've

forgotten the instructions. But when you make a mistake, it becomes a new figure. It's not perfect, but it's something else, and I love that."

The focus involved is also part of the appeal, Nieto-Fong says. Because she has to concentrate so closely on the delicate folds of the paper, there's no room to think about anything else, and she compares it to a deep meditative state.

"And when you fold something spontaneously, people feel like they've received a little piece of magic," she says. "You're at a restaurant and your napkin has just been turned into a bird. That's magical."

To get to that point takes a lot of patience, however. For those struggling to get started, Nieto-Fong recommends looking for instructions that make sense to you. Different tutorials can reach the same shape by taking different paths, and it's all about having the patience to find a set of instructions that people connect with, and to keep trying even after multiple failures.

"You might struggle with the instructions at first, or you'll find you make so many mistakes that you have folds all over your paper and you have to start with a new piece," she says. "But you won't get the figure right on your first try, or your second, or your third. You really do have to be patient." —Elizabeth Foster

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